



JULY/AUGUST 2022



OUR 2022
Heroes
SPECIAL

STARRING

**EWAN
McGREGOR**

PLUS
**BRAD PITT
DAISY EDGAR-JONES
FKA TWIGS
ROWAN ATKINSON**



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July/August

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GQ HEROES

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



G Q H Q	Behind the Scenes With the People Who Make GQ
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Contributor



BRIANA YOUNGER

Writer and broadcast journalist

Briana Younger is a music and culture critic and former *New Yorker* editor based in Los Angeles. For the cover of this issue, she profiled FKA twigs. "Getting to know twigs was such a beautiful and rewarding experience," Younger says. "I've enjoyed her music for a long time and being able to pull back a little of the mystique was a joy."

Office Grails



CHE KURRIEN
Head of editorial
content, *GQ India*
"Keeping time is
so much more
fun when you strap
on a Panerai."



**JOSEPHINE
JUDD**
Commerce
photo editor,
British GQ
"Jordan 4s or
Jordan 1s..."



DARIA DI LELLO
Visuals editor,
US GQ

"I'm recovering
from a childhood
where I was never
required to wear
a school uniform."





Illustrated by Quentin Blake

*Kerridge's Bar & Grill
Corinthia London*



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July/August



For our cover story on Rowan Atkinson, see page 128.

Coat, £2,350, by **Giorgio Armani**. Suit, £1,550, by **Canali**.
Shirt, £460, by **Brunello Cucinelli**. Tie, £95, pocket square, £50, by **Favourbrook**.

July/August



For our cover story on FKA twigs, see page 116.

Dress, £1,180, by **Nensi Dojaka**. Boots, £610, by **Fidan Novruzova**.
Earrings, £550, by **Shaun Leane**.

STYLIST, MATTHEW JOSEPHS. MAKEUP, LAUREN REYNOLDS FOR GUCCI BEAUTY. HAIR, LOUIS SOUVESTRE. NAILS, SIMONE CUMMINGS.

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BENNETT WINCH

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July/August



For our cover story on Brad Pitt, see page 154.

Jacket, £1,650, tank top, £625, by **Dolce & Gabbana**.
Necklaces, his own.

STYLIST, JON TIETZ.

GQ HEROES

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Introducing our 2022 GQ Heroes line-up:

EWAN McGREGOR
ROWAN ATKINSON
FKA TWIGS
DAISY EDGAR-JONES
PIERPAOLO PICCIOLI
MICHAELA JAÉ RODRIGUEZ
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BIMINI
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SAMUEL ROSS
ZANE LOWE
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HANS ULRICH OBRIST
BIANCA SAUNDERS
JACK DRAPER
FELICITY MORRIS AND BERNIE HIGGINS
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ANDREW KEITH

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Our stories about this year's Heroes speakers start on page 83.

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The House of Heroes

IT'S AN INTERESTING time to be making an issue of a magazine themed "Heroes". We get that. You could say with total authenticity that we're living in a culture dominated by villains, and complemented by antiheroes. We are divided and we are uncertain. We are pretty bloody mean to each other.

One side-effect of this moment we are in is the ever-rising bar of purity: there are few things – maybe even precious few people – we can all agree on. And in moments like these, it's easy to miss the great acts that are right in front of us. But they are, of course, still there. They always have been.

One problem with modern heroism is the notion that it is a supernatural feat; that being heroic is extraordinary and therefore, something we should treat as unordinary – something that is not for ordinary people. But perfection makes heroes boring. It's why superhero films were a total drainer until like, 2008.

The first superhero film I remember was *Batman & Robin* (Bat nipples!!!) And what the hell was heroic about Batman in that film? George Clooney just gallivants around the city, looking good, flirting with Elle Macpherson and flexing on Robin – in one scene, he literally pulls out a credit card to one-up him at an auction. In this Gotham, Batman is just a flawless, handsome and cashed-up jock. At least Mr Freeze had a vision.

No, superhero films only came into their own – and incidentally, started pulling down ten-figure box office results – when they demoted the superhero to mere mortal. *The Dark Knight* was, well, dark: Christian Bale's Batman is, over and over again, confronted by impossible ethical decisions. He falls short. He is human. But he tries. A modern-day superhero.

My point is, there's no heroism in perfection: heroism



ME, ON SET FOR THIS ISSUE. A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE PARTNERS WHO HELPED BUILD THE HOUSE THAT IS GQ HEROES THIS YEAR: BMW, KLARNA AND CELLULAR GOODS.

is in fact great and diligent acts taken in spite of our own flabby, greedy, lazy, egotistical flaws – it's us overcoming our awful selves, even just for a moment.

After pulling together this issue with our *GQ* team, I'm seeing heroism more broadly: not as narrow and superlative, but as an act of grace, big or small.

I – and this will sound silly, but hang with me – think that there's great heroism in admitting fault. I think there's heroism in seeing a lonely person at a party and speaking to them (Claudine Longet is, of course, the real hero in *The Party*). Sometimes heroism is loud. Sometimes it is whisper-quiet. But I don't believe there is heroism without flaws. Heroism is acting in spite of our shortcomings or protective instincts. A hero is simply an ordinary person who rose above themselves.

We've programmed our 2022 Heroes event – and the pages of this issue – to be a killer cross-section of this fresh idea of a hero.

Richard Ratcliffe showed us that heroism is standing up for your family. FKA twigs, by writing a moving and vulnerable public letter in the hopes that others could avoid the abuse she described suffering, which was denied by her alleged abuser. Azeem Rafiq, the British-Pakistani cricketer who confronted the simmering racism in county clubs, took a lonely and heroic stance by insisting that he – and the sport – deserved better. What's more, when his own shortcomings were revealed, he did what no cricketer did: he apologised without reservation. He connected with those he harmed. He learned.

These are outsized acts of heroism, but we're just as fascinated by those that are quieter, sillier, or of a new paradigm.

So yes, we do think there is

a heroism in empowering a new generation of sex workers and content creators, as Amrapali Gan and OnlyFans are. We believe there's something heroic about playing extraordinary fools for four decades, making a global audience belly-laugh along the way (the first episode of *Mr. Bean* I remember was that one in the pool – if there's not a knowing smile on your face right now, YouTube it urgently). Big, small, loud, discreet – we hope you're as stimulated by the stories in this issue as we are.

Finally, I've got to shout-out my heroes of the moment: the wild collective of people across the world who helped to pull this issue together. All these years later, it is still hard to convey the monstrous effort it takes to put one of these magazines out into the world: from design to research, visuals to fashion, production to editing. And that's not to mention the vast number of people outside of our Hanover Square offices. Among them: a fisherman named Mike (who helped cover star Daisy Edgar-Jones cast a line at Walthamstow Wetlands), a set designer named Rory (who was part of a team that crafted a papier-mâché wonderland for Rowan Atkinson), and Michael Darlington, who styled Ewan McGregor to perfection in Los Angeles. Thank you to these and so many more people. *GQ* loves you.

Adam Baidawi

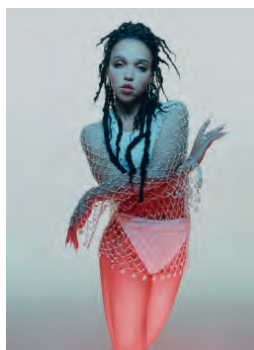
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On The Covers



FKA twigs photographed by Lee Wei Swee. Styled by Matthew Josephs.

Tank top, £297, shirt, £1,993, briefs, £284, by **Supriya Lele**. Earrings, £155, by **Swarovski**. Ring, £170, by **Shaun Leane**.

Rowan Atkinson photographed by Marcin Kempski. Styled by Rose Forde.

Suit, £1,850, shirt, £285, tie, £125, by **Dolce & Gabbana**. Matchbox, £395, by **Giuliva Heritage**.



Daisy Edgar-Jones photographed by Ben Parks. Styled by Nobuko Tannawa.

Cardigan, £840, shirt, £750, by **Marni**. Skirt, £520, by **Burberry**. Trousers, £800, by **Kwaidan Editions**.



Ewan McGregor photographed by Ryan Pfluger. Styled by Michael Darlington.

Cardigan, £840, by **Bode**. Shirt, £675, by **Dolce & Gabbana**. Skirt, £1,460, by **Louis Vuitton**.



Brad Pitt photographed by Elizaveta Porodina. Styled by Jon Tietz.

Shirt, £1,460, by **Louis Vuitton**. Trousers, £930, by **Versace**. Necklaces, his own. Ring, middle finger, £3,200, by **Bernard James**. Ring, little finger, £6,495, by **Fabergé**.



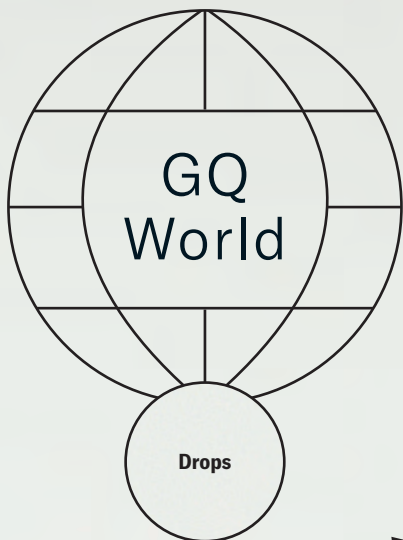
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18 Ways to Bring the Vay-Cay Vibes

Whether you're beaching in Bogota, snorkelling in the Seychelles or partying in Palermo, your summer rotation needs colour, pattern and a hefty dose of BHE (big holiday energy).

By TEO VAN DEN BROEKE AND MIKE CHRISTENSEN

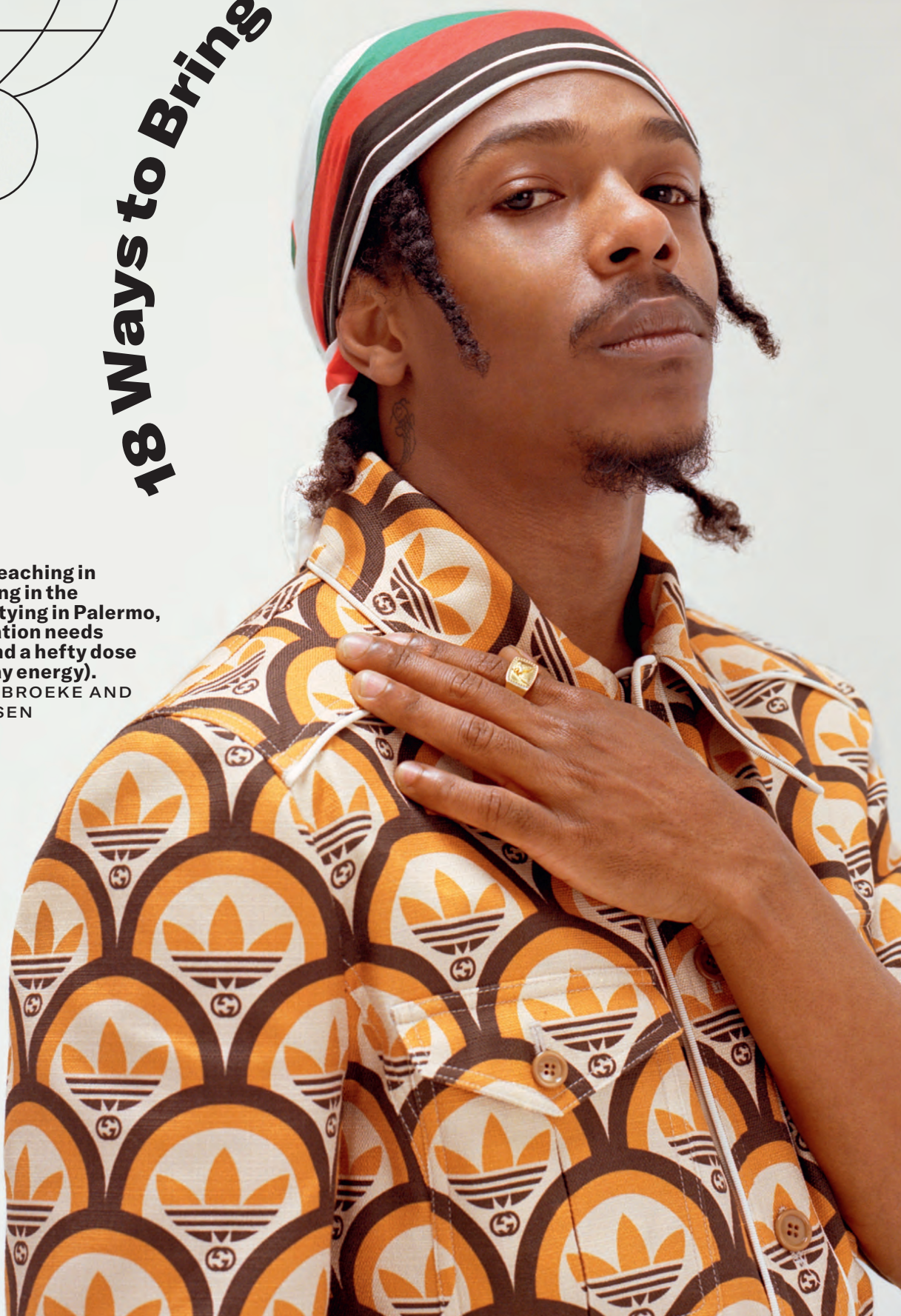
IT'S A BER-WIN

Yes, Berwyn is a rising prince in broody R&B, but everyone feels upbeat in **Adidas x Gucci**.

Jacket, £2,490, scarf, £345, by **Adidas x Gucci**. Ring, Berwyn's own.

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY RICHARD
DOWKER

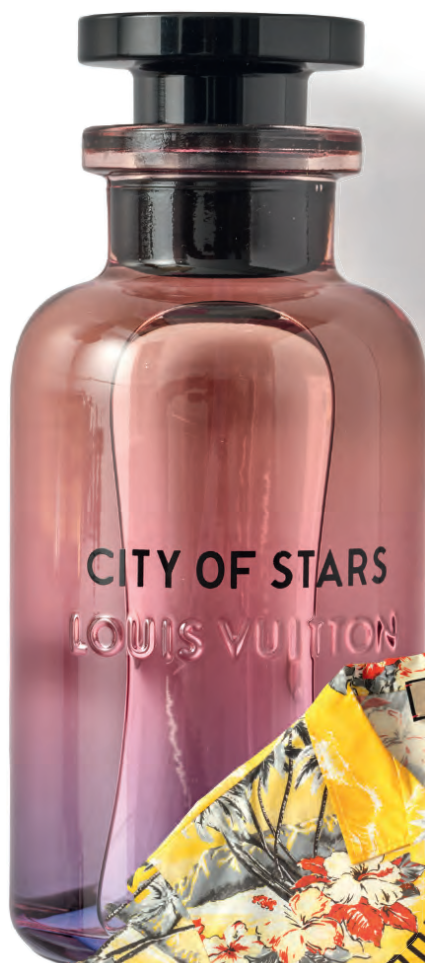
STYLED
BY ITUNU OKE





OWN THE TWILIGHT

Cooked up by **Louis Vuitton**'s master perfumer Jacques Cavallier Bellettrud in collaboration with Californian artist Alex Israel, the Parisian superbrand's peak summer scent radiates strains of blood orange, lemon, red mandarin, and bergamot (£215).



CITY OF STARS
LOUIS VUITTON



HELLO, YELLOW

For high summer bowling shirts with a side of "look-at-me", there is nowhere better than **Gucci**. Part of the brand's Love Parade collection, which was shown in and influenced by Hollywood, the shirt rocks a swooping Marilyn Monroe print (£700).



SHOW PONY

Heading to Amangiri for your summer break? Or maybe dropping in at the Belmond Group's Anguilla outpost, the Cap Juluca? Either way, you'll want an **Hermès** beach towel which costs the same as a second-hand car (£465).

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Berwyn is on the Verge

Navigating deep feelings of identity, nationality and greatness, the Trinidad-born rapper is ready to blow up.

FIRST I WAS AFRAID, I was petrified,” hums Berwyn. He is in the middle of recalling the first time he laid a finger on a piano key. He was 15. There’s a Christmas concert happening and Di Russell, his music teacher, is forcing him to perform. But he really doesn’t want to. “All my mandems [mates] were going to be there,” he says.

While everyone is getting ready, Berwyn decides to try playing some of the instruments. There is a music book on an electric piano with the chords written on top. He opens it on “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor.

“I remember playing the first note while singing and bro, I felt like God. I’d never been that lucky. It just felt mad. I didn’t know my power. I was like, ‘Miss, look at this.’ That was a nice moment, a really nice day,” Berwyn smiles, but his face drops. “Actually that was the same day they stabbed up Charlie fucking Morris. They took his phone in an alley. Yeah, that wasn’t a good day actually, I take that back.”

The Trinidad-born, Romford-raised rapper has always lived life on an edge. Since he arrived in Britain aged nine, he’s been blighted by immigration issues even though his mother is a British citizen. He couldn’t attend university, despite having the grades. In 2020 he was deemed ineligible for a BRIT Award nomination. While his papers have since been finalised, his younger brother is going through the same problems. It’s something that makes Berwyn understandably angry, but thanks to that pivotal piano moment, music has always served as a safe place; his calling.

“Music fills me with certainty and assurance. I don’t really know the rules of love or of family but with music,

BEACH-READY FIT
Trinidad’s (and Romford’s) finest shows that shorts, socks and Birks make summer breezier than ever.

Sweatshirt, £1,200, t-shirt, £1,050, shorts, £900, beige glasses case, £620, other glasses case, (price upon request), by **Dior**. Necklace, £205, by **Completedworks**. Sunglasses, £405, by **Lunetterie Générale**. Sandals, £120, by **Birkenstock** at Schuh. Socks, £15, by **Falke**.



I know I'm going to write a slapper every time I try it," he says.

At 5ft 4in, Berwyn cuts a diminutive figure, but his presence is mighty. There's a dynamism: he doesn't walk, he bounces, floating on his feet as if in his own gravitational orbit.

In 2020, critical acclaim and success came with DEMOTAPE/VEGA, his debut mix tape. He was recognised by BBC Sounds and nominated for the Mercury Prize in 2021. Having followed up with TAPE 2/FOMALHAUT last year, he's now coming to terms with the nascent stages of true fame. "I work so much better under pressure, it fills me with a sense of responsibility. When a man does not have purpose, he's just a leaf blowing. He's not come from any garden, he's not going to any garden, he's just blowing. And who wants to be that guy?"

Late last year, the grade-II listed walls of Islington town hall played host to his infectious set. Berwyn's performance was the perfect antidote to pandemic PTSD: wild, energetic, soulful, destructive, unleashed. Though tracks like "Trap Phone" and "Crushed Velvet" veer towards inky, late-night R&B, a simmering intensity underscored the whole show.

"Chaos is one of the most useful instruments in this cosmos and one of the most difficult to generate artificially," he muses about his creative process. "I like to not have a system and rely on laws... chaos is so much more useful to the equation than order."

When it comes to life though, he craves the opposite. "I want to just be structured. Disciplined." The UK government has put paid to that, regardless of him wanting it to be so. Nevertheless, he is thankful to his parents for bringing him here and teaching him what they did – "I'm also grateful for them not being here and not teaching me so I had to learn for myself when the time was right," he adds, in reference to his father, who's always remained in Trinidad.

Outside of music, there is football. "I'm proud of the fact I'm still a Man United boy. Even if we finish 12th, I'm still going to be here." Lately, as he puts it, he's been on "the TV thing". "It's part of my self love. I don't need to work 18 hours to prove to anybody how long I can work for. I can work for eight hours and love myself." He's just finished *After Life* with Ricky Gervais ("I like good dialogue"), he watched *Top Boy* because it's culturally relevant ("It was difficult to enjoy but I did enjoy it – I have to know where people's heads are at") and he loved *Peaky Blinders* ("Thomas Shelby be the best character ever on TV"). Unlike a lot of rappers, fashion isn't really his bag, but that's not to say he doesn't appreciate

Jacket, £340, trousers, £335, by **Homme Plisse Issey Miyake**. Hat, £425, by **Loewe**. Flower bag, £320, by **ERL** at Mr Porter, turquoise bag, £810, by **Bottega Veneta** at Mr Porter. Cream bag, £300, by **Paul Smith**. Striped bag, £1,590, by **Louis Vuitton**.



it. "A\$AP Rocky ain't put out an album in ages but his foothold in fashion has sustained him over some of the greatest rappers," he says. "To ignore it just because I don't really like clothes is stupid. I know it often walks hand in hand with music."

Next up in Berwyn's world is festival season, but, he explains, that's merely a way of earning him quality time to work on his next album.

"We've got to do the shows, get the cheddar, buy mum a new pair of heels then go caveman and scientist mode, lock myself away." He's got a selection of songs that don't compromise on quality and can serve as a placeholder while he's underground, including "Rise Above", which he's just collaborated on with the duo Ibeyi.

Identity, inevitably, figures in the 25-year-old's thinking. "I've always fallen short of my identity because I didn't want it," Berwyn says. "It's like listening in school and reading books 'is white'. Culture defines identity, everybody else just runs under its definition. If I don't then I'm unfulfilled, which is annoying, to be honest."

"My new album will touch on the toxicity of Black identity. It's all about the self detriment of natural occurrences, political, economical and geopolitical," he says. "Spoiler: at the end of the album, Black genome is reduced to one per cent, global average. I want it to be brilliant and difficult to beat. Not that it's a competition," he says. "But that's how we evolve. You set the benchmark and someone beats it."



NEW DAWN, NEW DRIP

There is no hotter brand in the world right now than **ERL**. With a focus on textural, ASMR-infused pieces with a highly wearable bent, Californian designer Eli Russell Linnetz's satisfyingly schlumpy aesthetic is epitomised by this dégradé wool sweater (£425, matchesfashion.com).



BEACH TIME

Intending on hitting the water? **Omega** has you covered. Its latest Seamaster Planet Ocean Ultra Deep 6000m goes to the absolute depths of the sea. You probably won't go deeper than three metres, but don't let that ruin a good anecdote (£10,350).



GET WAVY

Overseen by French-Moroccan designer Charaf Tajer, **Casablanca** is a cult brand known for colourful, '70s-infused summer separates. This guayabera shirt is a South Beach-ready case in point (£550).



NIGHTTIME KNIT

If you're in the market for a bright, bold knit with close-to-home provenance, look no further than London-based brand **AGR**. This sweater-vest is a killer layer for when the sun goes down (£435).

SUN SCENT

Blown through with summery notes of pêche de vigne, Sicilian blood orange oil and cardamom, this grown-up warm weather fragrance from **Tom Ford** is beach-ready by design (£240).

SUPERIOR SUN CREAM

Monaco-based skincare brand **Lancaster** has been producing elite SPF-infused creams since 1956 – they have wide spectrum protection against UVA and UVB rays, and the bottles look cool poking out of your beach bag, too (£28).

BEACH BAG

Affordable luxury has a friendly face in the form of French brand **Longchamp**. This net bag in mango-yellow is distinct enough to not get lost à la plage (£80).

TIE-DYE HOODIE

Inspired by the world of surfing, this cotton hoodie is part of **Emporio Armani**'s sustainable collection, manufactured entirely from recycled and (importantly) recyclable materials (£330).

DENIM CROSSBODY

Pebble-dashed with US brand **Coach**'s "C" monogram, this laser-finished denim crossbody has "down the Rabbit Hole at Glasto" written all over it (£195).

TOM FORD
BITTER PEACH
EAU DE PARFUM
50 ML

OUTRÉ SHADES

Trust **Versace** to come up with the summer's most souped-up sunnies. Featuring the label's iconic Medusa emblem and finished in on-trend teal, don't take them off 'til September (£234).

GQ World

Drops

TRAFFIC CONE HAT

No one does bright summer pieces with a proper sud-de-France vibe better than **Jacquemus**. Wear this hat for a weekend at the Calanques, or anywhere, really (£75).

BLING RING

British jewellery brand **Hatton Labs** has cornered the market in masculine pieces with a jolt of playfulness: like this rainbow-hued tennis ring (£295).

SMARTSWIMMERS

Brit label **Sunspel** makes many of its garments in Nottingham – these crisp swimming shorts are the most practical way for you to take a slice of home with you on holiday this summer (£155).

KILL BILL SNEAKERS

Made famous by Uma Thurman in Tarantino's cult classic, pop on these banana-hued **Onitsuka Tiger** Mexico 66 sneakers to finish a fit with a splash (£195).

FLIP PHONE

Just as the 1990s is influencing fashion again, the decade is also impacting our tech. Enter **Samsung**'s ultra-smart Flip 3: part oyster shell mobile, part fully-fledged tablet. The right kind of nostalgia (£949).

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Tremaine Emory Reigns Supreme

From growing up in Queens, to collaborating with Frank Ocean and Kanye West, the newly crowned creative director of Supreme has spent his career exploring the intersection between fashion and history. Now, he's ready to tell his own story. By LUKE LEITCH



“My Uncle Ray, a brick mason, was a huge style influence. The way he wore his hat was important to him; the way he wore flannel or tucked his shirt.”

O N A SLEET-STREAKED Manhattan day this past February, Tremaine Emory swung out of his new workplace in SoHo in search of lunch. He spotted a bakery and stepped inside – only to be served something else entirely. “The guy in there sees me and screams, ‘GET OUT! Get out of here! I told you not to come in here – it’s for paying customers only,’” Emory says. Emory is talking on a video call from the neat but impersonal-looking serviced East Village apartment that is his current home, leaning in towards the screen. “This guy screaming at me, he’s a white dude. I go, ‘Why are you speaking to me like this, sir?’ And he goes, ‘Oh. I thought you were this homeless person that comes in and bothers us.’ And I go, ‘And why did you think I was a homeless person: because I’m Black?’ He says, ‘No! It’s not that. I couldn’t even tell the colour of your skin – it’s the way you are dressed.’”

Emory, for the record, was wearing a Balenciaga trench over a leopard-print Balenciaga minidress that he styles as a sweater. Under that was a hoodie by the 2022 LVMH prize finalist ERL. A punchy look for sure, even borderline *outré*, but not especially radical for downtown New York – and certainly no reason for the outburst. Emory doesn’t think it was the clothes, either. “The reason is, no matter what I do, I’m Black with dreads and a beard...No matter what I do, what I achieve, I still have folks in SoHo shouting at me in a bakery on Lafayette Street.”

Emory’s mood lifts a little. “The most ironic thing? There’s also another guy in there who works at Tom Sachs’ studios around the corner. So while this bakery guy’s kicking me out and I am challenging him, with dignity, he sees me and comes up and goes, ‘Hey, Trey! What’s up! *Congratulations!*’”

Because like almost everyone else in the neighbourhood (bakery guy apart), as well as the entire world of contemporary fashion, the Sachs studio guy had read the news: Tremaine Emory had just been named new creative director of Supreme, one of the biggest street-wear brands on the planet. Emory finishes the story and laughs. But the smudged tracks of freshly wiped tears remain visible on his cheeks.

I LAST SAW Tremaine Emory in the flesh in early spring, shortly after the profiling incident at the bakery. We were in Paris, at Off-White’s Spaceship Earth show at the Palais Brongniart, the brand’s first to be held posthumously after Virgil Abloh’s passing last November. Abloh shows remain sorrowful: transmitters of memory, reminders of loss. Yet following the rawness and shock of November’s Louis Vuitton show in Miami, and then the deliberate ceremonial weight of January’s autumn/winter 2022 Paris chapter, the atmosphere at the Palais was more joyous, less laden. Outside, the crowds were screaming for Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky and Pharrell. Inside, the milling crowd included Nigo, Jerry Lorenzo, Grace Wales Bonner, Olivier Rousteing and Ibn Jasper. Amongst all these luminaries of the cultural arts universe, attention orbited around Emory, too. The delight at his appointment appeared universal, evidenced in the many enthusiastic handshakes and back slaps heading his way. “People seem to be really happy about it, happy for me, and happy for Supreme – just happy in general about it,” Emory says. “So I was a bit overwhelmed, in a good way.”

You could, if you wanted, chart Emory’s ascent to the lead creative position at what is arguably America’s most influential streetwear brand solely via his employment history. His first fashion job was on a J.Crew shop floor in the early noughties. He came up through a buzzy array of creative projects in fashion, parties, music and art, chiefly via his multidisciplinary practice No Vacancy Inn, which he put together with one of his closest creative collaborators, Acyde. More recently, Emory’s fashion brand Denim Tears has explored fashion’s relationship with African American history and

exploitation, all while embracing main-street collaborations with the likes of Levi and Uggs; the brand’s American flag-embroidered look featuring Tyson Beckford was included in the Met Costume Institute’s 2021 exhibition “In America: A Lexicon of Fashion”. There are stories about working with Kanye, Frank Ocean, André 3000 and Virgil himself. But Emory’s is a life whose recent chapters cannot be fully understood unless you dive into his earlier material. As Emory says: “It all goes back to how I was raised.”

Emory was born in Georgia in July 1981. A few months later, his mother Sheralyn and father Tracy moved the family to Jamaica in Queens, New York. His mother ran the household and was assiduous in exposing her sons to culture. Emory remembers seeing Pavarotti sing with the Harlem Boys Choir in Central Park, and seeing *Cats* on Broadway, and visits to the Queens Natural History Museum. At age six, he was taken to the pet store and chose himself a “beautiful little cat, a calico, striped and golden,” whom he christened “Fashion”. He also cites his Uncle Ray, a brick mason at the time, as a style influence: “The way he wore his hat was so important to him. The way he walked, the way he wore flannel or tucked his T-shirt, the way he wore a fedora or a trucker cap.”

Emory says he feels lucky. For many of his neighbours, the awareness of a life outside of Queens, let alone the US, was faint. But in Tracy, he had a father who lifted his eye to a telescope to a world beyond. “He was a cameraman for CBS News for years. I remember at school being proud: he had the coolest job on careers day. The stories that affected him most were when he was in Africa, travelling with Mayor David Dinkins to meet the Pope and Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and covering the Rwandan genocide.” Emory remembers watching Washington’s football team (“back then they were called the Redskins but no longer, thankfully”) play the New York Giants from the press box. Sport and its lessons were fundamental. So too was the march, also in Washington, that Tracy and Sheralyn walked with their sons and 250,000 others to mark the 20th anniversary of Martin Luther King’s original 1963 march, at which he



delivered his “I Have a Dream” clarion call. The Emory boys were encouraged to read: seminal texts include James Baldwin’s “The Fire Next Time” and “The Andy Warhol Diaries”.

As Tremaine recounts this story, we tangent slightly to discuss the overlaps between Warhol and Abloh. Both had an artistically omnivorous mindset. “Absolutely,” says Emory. “You know, my dad brainwashed me. So I’d be brushing my teeth and he’d come into the bathroom and say, ‘There’s an art to everything, even brushing your teeth.’ And then he’d walk out. Virgil understood that, that there’s an art to everything – so go choose it. And for me, comparing Virgil to Warhol in making art, Virgil was better. Because he was nicer to people.”

As a kid, Emory started selling Marvel cards, mowing lawns, earning his own money to spend on clothes and sneakers. After graduating from school, Emory got a job loading packages for FedEx, and briefly studied film-making at LaGuardia Community College, but dropped out. He took that job at J.Crew, then another, at a liquor store in Queens, then at Kate Spade in SoHo. We are fast-forwarding here, but it’s worth a pause to note that it was at this time that Emory started hanging most days after work at Union, the store co-owned by Mary Anne Fusco and her then-partner James Jebbia who, in 1994, founded Supreme. In 2006, Emory was supposed to meet Jebbia to discuss a retail job (“I really wanted to work at Union”) but before Jebbia’s schedule allowed, Emory had taken another gig, at Marc Jacobs.

The job was in the stock room, in theory one of the lowliest roles (but also amongst the most essential) in retail. Yet in his final interview for the position, Emory was assessed by no less than company president Robert Duffy and Marc Jacobs himself. Within a year, Emory was moved to the shop floor. Emory fondly recalls the company’s democratic, inclusive ethos at the time. “No matter where you were, from the stockroom to the board room, you got the same clothing allowance every year: 12 garments and two pairs of shoes.” He was in a relationship with Hadarra More, then the manager of the store he worked in, had a solid job, and solid friends. It was all good.



Emory hopes to make clothes about the African American experience that kids will line up to buy.

Then, in 2008, came the event that transformed his outlook, that made him realise he needed to leave. As Emory tells it: “I’m from Jamaica, Queens. The hood. I’ve seen people shot. Had bullets fly past me from house parties getting shot up. I’ve seen people sell and use drugs. Like Jay-Z said, I’ve seen hoop dreams deflate. I’ve seen people go to jail for killing a friend, or killing a girl. All kinds of fucked-up stuff. I’ve been pulled off a bus and pushed up against it by the cops because a kid from a white prep

school got robbed. Or walking to the store, had the cops shake me down and ask me where the drugs and money are at. And you are just a good kid that ain’t never carried a gun. You know?”

“So my goal gradually became to get out of Jamaica, Queens, without something bad happening to me. And those things were happening, not just to drug dealers or people involved in that life, but to regular people. The first Black entrepreneur I ever knew was my man, Rahim Grays, who was my barber. He had a daughter, he was a great

“I don’t know how I ended up in The Met. It’s not that I have impostor syndrome – I deserve to be here – it’s that no matter what I achieve, it still won’t change certain things.”

father, and he was my friend. He was the only person who cut my little brother’s hair, who cut my hair. He worked and he worked and he worked. Finally he opened his own shop. And then within a year there were people trying to extort him. Some jackboys were sent in to rob him. He wouldn’t have it. So they shot him and killed him. And I remember my father calling me, saying: ‘Rahim Grays...’ And I knew then that I was done. I said, ‘I gotta get out of here because I can’t breathe.’”

Shortly after, Marc Jacobs asked Emory’s girlfriend to relocate to London in order to open a new store. Emory knew little about the British capital (“and I didn’t really care”) but he persuaded her to go for it, and pushed to go along too. He applied for his first passport. “I had to go. And I just knew that if I did something, good could happen. I was very emotional leaving my family. I remember at my leaving party I was crying profusely, and my mother was saying, ‘You gotta go. You gotta get on that plane.’”

Emory pauses for a moment. He has been crying, as he thinks of Grays. “That’s why I’m not trying to kill myself to achieve more. I don’t know how I slipped through. I know I have my parents, my family and my friends. But I don’t know how I ended up in The Met. It’s not that I have impostor syndrome – I deserve to be there – it’s that I also know no matter what I achieve, it won’t change certain things. Here’s an example.” And it’s now that he tells me his story about the bakery. Of being told to get out, being told he didn’t belong, in his first week back living in New York after seven years away, at the very moment of what seemed like the apex of his achievements so far.

EMORY ARRIVED IN LONDON in 2010, the right man in the right place, at the right time. As he puts it: “You can’t control confluence, you can only seize it... and so much was going on at that time in London. BBK and the penetration of grime into US culture; A\$AP Mob was always in London, Frank [Ocean] moved to London and me and Frank started working together; Sam Ross was coming up, Palace was coming up, Martine Rose, Wales Bonner.” London was a “petri dish”, as Emory puts it, somewhere where different voices were growing, interacting, connecting. “It’s tapestry, all part of the painting,” Emory says. “And I’m super grateful to have been living in London, and just alive on Earth at the time and around such amazing, inspiring people.”

A key player in the petri dish was British-born cultural consultant Acyde (Ade Odunlami), who Emory met in his first year in town. “I was at a Nike party that my friend Heron Preston invited me to. Acyde looked really cool. He was smoking a cigar. I was like, ‘Can I have one?’ And then we started talking; we’ve been friends ever since. Maybe a year later, he was like, ‘Would you be down to do a party with me? I feel like if you host the party that I DJ it’d be great.’ And then we started doing this party called Midnight at Manero’s.”

That was 2012. Soon, the pair had started throwing nights at Serge Becker’s Soho pseudo-porno Mexican speakeasy La Bodega Negra where in 2013, Emory first connected with both Abloh and Frank Ocean. Shortly after, Abloh brought Ye (then known as Kanye West) for an Acyde and Emory-hosted night that turned into an impromptu listening party for *Yeezus*. “Our friendship was cemented there,” says Emory of Abloh. “And after those nights we would talk about the things we wanted to do. And then we’d wake up the next day and attempt to do them. We were unwavering in our attempts to mix down the human condition through making things.”



Emory says he’s on the “hero’s journey” – finding knowledge and bringing it back to where he came from.



Stüssy hired Acyde and Emory to play a party in LA “for some Vans event.” Emory began consulting for the brand. Momentum was building so much that when restructuring at Marc Jacobs led to mass layoffs in 2015, Emory was unperturbed. He took his £30,000 severance pay to pump into No Vacancy Inn, his and Acyde’s collective moniker, “to build it as a brand around the parties, and podcasts and clothes.” When that money ran out, he razed his pension fund to the tune of £26,000: “and by the time that money ran out, I was in a place where I could support myself and pay my bills.” Still representing No Vacancy Inn by night (“ripping around the world with Acyde”), Emory was hired to work for Ye and moved to LA in 2016 “for a couple of years, but then he fired me.” Asked why, Emory laughs. “You’d have to ask him.” He adds, “A lot of people say, ‘Oh, when I left this job,’ but if you got fired, you got fired. There’s nothing wrong with it. I am proud that I got fired by Kanye. I wear it as a badge of honour.” From there, Emory picked up a role as art director at large for Stüssy, worked a while with Andre 3000 and then in August 2019, started a new label under a name he’d used before: Denim Tears.

The name itself is a double entendre. “You’re the first person that doesn’t know me who’s picked up that it’s ‘tears’ [weep] and ‘tears’ [rips] simultaneously,” Emory says. “It’s a name about human attrition, the attrition of the human condition. Human beings start out like a brand new pair of jeans, but are you better as a baby or as a 50 year old? As a baby, you’re beautiful, you’re innocent, you ain’t had nobody hurt you. As a 50 year old, maybe you have high blood pressure, you’ve broken hearts, had yours broken, been nice to people, been mean to people, read books, done things you’re proud of and things you’re not...You’ve achieved something but you feel like you’ve achieved nothing. Those are the tears. We are obsessed by youth but the older I get, the more interested I am in how your soul finds its patina through time.

“And the name also applies to cotton, and slavery, and the glory and plight of the African diaspora. My father’s first job was picking cotton, as a kid. It’s inspired as much by the storytelling of Wales Bonner as it is of Supreme. Once

I was in the Supreme store in London and they did these Martin Luther King hoodies and the hoodies were on sale. And I just thought, this is a problem: these should be sold out. Then I thought, what if I can make a brand that makes kids line up to buy and wear clothes that are about the plight and glory of the African American experience – that would be something worth doing. I don’t know if I can get kids to read “The Fire Next Time” but if I can get them to wear a pair of jeans that starts a conversation about Baldwin, or Alvin Ailey, then that’s something real and worthwhile.”

Emory’s intention is to give Supreme followers the same education his family and friends gave to him. Asked about his immediate plans, however, he says his chief ambition is to start a family of his own, now that he is home. “The point of the hero’s journey is to find knowledge and bring it back to

where you came from,” he says, “You left because you knew there was more out there that was needed for your tribe, for your people, for your community. And then you bring it back.”

This leads me to one last question. At the bakery, Emory reckoned that as well as being Black, it was his wearing dreadlocks that prompted the guy to show his ugly colours. Why does Emory wear dreadlocks? “Nobody’s ever asked me that before,” he replies. “And you’re going to get the truth. The dreads are about mourning for Rahim Grays. It was hard for me to get haircuts after he died, but I probably did for about a year after. And then I just started to let it grow. They are an ode to him. I guess I’ll never wear a Caesar [haircut] again. I’m a bit emo, a bit of a romantic. But these are an ode to my friend.” ❖

LUKE LEITCH is a freelance fashion writer based in London.



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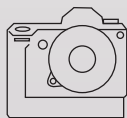
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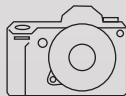
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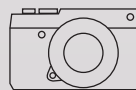
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Why Tiny Changes Are Big News in Swiss Watches

Tiny changes to classic luxury watches have enthusiasts like me hooked on finding out the latest news from the Swiss masters, says GQ watch columnist Nick Foulkes.

AMONG ROLEX'S 2022 releases, the uncontested headline grabber was the southpaw, crown-at-nine GMT Master II with the black and green bezel – the Sprite or Riddler, if you're into nicknames. It's the sort of stunt Rolex geeks love and a chance for the Crown's social media family to post pictures of other lefthanded Rolexes of the past. As a seasonal trophy watch it's a slam dunk, but it is not a watch for me. I've been thinking about the relaunch of the most historic and the most perplexing of Rolexes – the Air-King.

Unlike the usual does-what-it-says-on-the-dial Rolex nomenclature (Submariner for divers, Day-Date for a watch that shows the day and date), the Air-King's functionality is not associated with aviation. Hypotheses that it was named for RAF pilots for the Battle of Britain in 1940 are poorly substantiated, probably deriving

from the name being registered in Switzerland during 1943. Today, the Air-King stands as a lone model after its family of Air-prefixed models comprising Tigers, Lions and Giants were discontinued. Production also ended on a Speedking, a smaller watch, in the late 1950s when the model relaunched under the slogan "Introducing Air-King, the new Rolex Oyster Perpetual".

The Air-King was reborn in 2016 as a 40 mm watch with the dial we now associate with the model: hours marked at 3, 6 and 9, and the rest of the dial calibrated in five-minute increments with an inverted triangle at 12: the effect was that of speed or rev counter. The crown motif was printed in gold, Rolex in green – the striking design was a cause for comment amongst Rolex watchers, creating an identity that in no way could be confused with the regular Oyster range.

For me, the transition wasn't ample enough to give it 'Professional' status.

The sides of the case were still curved and there were no crown guards.

Fast-forward to 2022 and the Air-King has had a complete makeover, but unless you look closely, the only obvious alteration is the addition of crown guards. There is much more to it than that, and the aggregation of barely perceptible changes has the cumulative strength to U-turn my opinion. Typical of Rolex, identifying these alterations is like a PhD-level spot the difference, which for watch enthusiasts is all part of the appeal.

The storied history of the Air-King is testament to Rolex's independence and judgement to change as it sees fit, and the incremental changes to the 2022 version plays into that narrative. For instance, the addition of an 'O' before the '5' on the minutes scale is *huge*. The now-straight sides and the Oysterlock safety clasp with Easylink extension align it with core Professional timepieces like the Submariner and the GMT Master. The dial is 0.8 mm wider. Another change is only visible in the dark: new lume claims to remain luminous for double the time and is apparently whiter than white in daylight. It houses a new movement, Cal 3230, which reduces the height of the watch from 13.1 mm to 11.59 mm. Changes to the bracelet are almost as seismic – it's nearly an entire millimetre broader.

Rolex's priority has always been the long-term health of the brand rather than myopic concern with the next quarter. It would have been easier to make another pastel-coloured Oyster Perpetual than reengineer a peripheral model. But this typifies the long-sightedness of large independent brands that have the power of their own conviction to decide what they do next.

Patek could turn its entire production over to its Nautilus and still not meet demand, but instead it discontinued its best-selling Nautilus Ref. 5711 and launched two gold-strap watches (including a new Calatrava Ref. 5226G) – a powerplay that was well respected.

Likewise, Chopard, having struck gold with the Alpine Eagle sports watch, unexpectedly made noise this year about its L.U.C Full Strike minute repeaters, even if they were only able to manufacture a handful annually.

In doing so, Patek, Chopard and Rolex reflect the broader offer of Swiss watchmaking rather than becoming a single sector or, even more narrow, single-model brands. Such decisions demonstrate how serious brands are about every detail. But considered changes – incremental or wholesale – show confidence and keep watch enthusiasts on their toes. Prioritising the unexpected over the easy win worked – everyone is paying attention.

Above: the Patek Calatrava, Rolex's new Air-King and Chopard's exposed L.U.C Full Strike.

Why Boss Hit Reset

The Teutonic superbrand has had a seismic refresh – and it's drawing eyes.

By TEO VAN DEN BROEKE



THE FASHION INDUSTRY, it's a-changing. Where once the world's biggest superbrands dominated by sheer force of mass – putting out the same product season after season to a blindly loyal consumer – the rise of Insta-marketing and fast-paced influencer culture has meant that even the most powerful labels are having to recalibrate and reconfigure in order to stay in step.

Enter Boss. Once world-renowned for producing among the most serviceable business suits in the game, earlier this year the German label underwent a comprehensive refresh at the hands of CEO Daniel Grieder and new senior VP of creative direction Marco Falconi. The pair moved swiftly, announcing a new "Boss Cast" (including rapper Future, boxer Anthony Joshua and Italian tennis star Matteo Berrettini, among others), pulling in a distinct palette of white, black and camel, and shifting the wider aesthetic mood into a far more casual zone. "We want to be a 24/7 lifestyle brand for men and women, reach out to younger consumers and turn them into true fans," Grieder said of the refresh back in January.

"I have always been a fan of Boss and it's an honour to collaborate with such a powerhouse fashion brand," said Berrettini. "[Particularly] one that is at the top of its game when it comes to style and technical expertise." In real terms, all this new energy is manifesting in technical sports-infused separates: soft twill shorts in toothsome toffee hues to nylon shell jackets, easy wearing trainers and, of course, hybrid tailored items like track-cum-suit pants and stretch fabric blazer-bombers which can just as easily be worn to the office as they can, well, to play tennis.

Jacket, £389, trainers, £289, shorts, £79, and hoodie, £169, by **Boss**.

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Your Favourite Artist's



A new wave of creatives is taking hold of the wheel. A-Cold-Wall* designer Samuel Ross, Louis Vuitton music master Benji B, and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist nominate the tastemakers who have caught their eyes and ears.

Favourite Artist

SAMUEL ROSS

NOMINATES MAC COLLINS

The A-Cold-Wall* founder champions a British furniture designer claiming his seat at the table.

By ZAK MAOUI

Samuel Ross wants to shout about Mac Collins. “Tell me how many Black furniture designers or artists you know. There’s David Adjaye and that’s it,” says the creative director of A-Cold-Wall*. “Mac fills the void.” The Nottingham-born furniture designer is making a noise in British interiors, carving out a space which explores his British-Caribbean identity through Afrofuturist design. “He has an exceptional level of polish and veneer, and there is no one operating at his level of execution,” says Ross, who – in the spirit of putting your money where your mouth is – awarded Collins one of his Black British and POC artist grants, designed to champion outstanding talent.

So what makes Collins a great shout? Well, there’s his Iklwa chair, made from oak and ash. British furniture maker Benchmark produced it in 2020 and, though any synergy with Black Panther is a coincidence, the Iklwa is fit for a king. “Mac’s Iklwa throne has an intense spear-like design that will dominate any room,” Ross says.

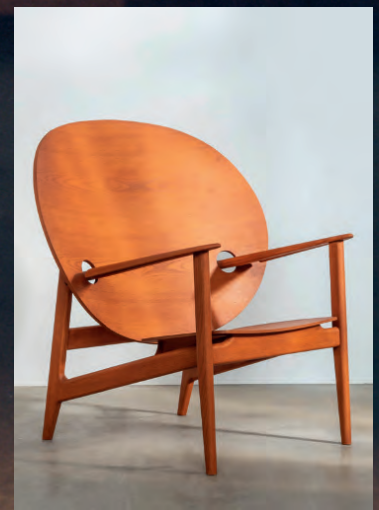
Collins’ Rudimentary stools offer another fresh take. Intentionally low seats, they nod to classical

architecture and West African Senufo stools. Ross is a fan and finds personal connection in the craft. “Mac is part of a generation of designers who belong to the Black diaspora,” says Ross, who is also of British-Caribbean heritage. “They’re engaging with traditional West African forms in their work, through how the wood is lacquered or, in Mac’s instance, through the use of dominoes, which are prominent in any Caribbean person’s history.”

One of the few Black designers in the Nottingham furniture industry, Collins is quickly picking up steam. He won the inaugural Ralph Saltzman Prize this year, the Emerging Design Medal at the London Design Festival 2021 and has had a solo show at the Design Museum. “The work he’s doing is slicing through,” says Ross. “He isn’t just living in a silo of subculture.”

“Mac will teach everyone, myself included, that personal journeys are value propositions,” says Ross. “Those high up in fine art and furniture design are realising that the stories of the diaspora need to be told, and Mac is doing that.”

This, ultimately, is what the 26-year-old designer brings to the industry. “Mac’s out here shouting about his British and Caribbean heritage,” Ross says. “Everything is designed and made in his hometown and it taps into Caribbean design. This resonates, and will ultimately make him successful because – while it is his own story – it is also a shared story that isn’t shouted about enough.”



Mac Collins and one of his mid armchairs in miniature; the Iklwa chair.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

NOMINATES PRECIOUS OKOYOMON

The Serpentine's artistic director digs this multidisciplinary artist's wild and immersive work.
By TEO VAN DEN BROEKE

Poetry. Sculpture. Edible ball gags. There are multiple entry points into the world of artist Precious Okoyomon, whose installations are fantastical natural worlds filled with written word, visual art and all-you-can-eat BDSM gear.

Want to know what else is on the menu? To elaborate further is Hans Ulrich Obrist, artistic director of the Serpentine Gallery, who first encountered Okoyomon through their poetry, then discovered there were whole other worlds to their art. "Okoyomon is an amazing poet," says Ulrich Obrist. "I was amazed that there didn't seem to be any kind of boundary between Okoyomon's poetry and visual art. They also have an extraordinary body of performance work and an amazing practice of making drawings."

Okoyomon explores multiple themes. An early poetry collection *Ajebota* (2016) examined Black queer immigrant identity. Their first large-scale sculpture restaged American south lynching trees, later reimaged on the scale of a small forest in their 2019 exhibition, *A Drop of Sun Under the Earth*. Immersive environments are an important facet of Okoyomon's work, allowing them to dig deep into ideas about race, nature, life and death. Recent installations have delved further into

the natural world and its destruction. Sex is also served up – hence the sex toy edibles – through their queer cooking collective, Spiral Theory Test Kitchen, whose cuisine Pose actor Indya Moore called "the most queer, trans, gender non-conforming food I've ever had in my whole life".

For Okoyomon, fluidity is key. For their champion, it makes choosing a favourite piece difficult. But nominating them as one to watch? Not so hard. "Okoyomon is a complete artist because there are so many dimensions to their practice," says Ulrich Obrist. "Think of Hildegard of Bingen from the 12th century. She ran a monastery, was a healer, a writer, a poet, a composer. Okoyomon is like that – there are so many dimensions to their work."



Precious Okoyomon; *Angel of Death* (2020), made from raw lamb's wool, dirt, wire and yarn.





BENJI B

NOMINATES ELMIENE

How Louis Vuitton's music director went deep with an emerging soul artist.

By JACK KING

DJ, producer and Louis Vuitton music director Benji B is here for British musician Elmiene's deep soul music. But he doesn't want you to take his word for it. Take the word of Virgil Abloh, who greenlit Elmiene's track "Golden" for what tragically was to be his first posthumous Louis Vuitton presentation. "Some of the last messages we exchanged were about music for the Miami show," recalls Benji B. "[With 'Golden'], he just came back with exclamation marks and 'APPROVED.'"

Abloh, predictably, showed impeccable taste. Elmiene's music has an instant Caps-Lock-on effect on your ears. Benji B first met the musician in a studio session where emerging artists were invited to collaborate. Near the end, Elmiene raised his voice. "He shyly said, 'Do you reckon I can play something I've been working on?'" Benji B explains. "It was one of those moments where we're all listening to the music and I look at the guy like, 'Who are you? And what is this *tune*?'"

That track was "Golden": an effortless, deeply emotive cut, and Benji B immediately vibed. "It's so refreshing when you hear new soul music that is *that* good," he says, "and it's so unusual to hear a first song that strong." He pledged to do something good – great even – with the music. Bringing on new talent is, he says, an important part of the deal at Louis Vuitton. "I was thinking, wow, I want to put this in a project."

The plan was to put "Golden" in the Miami show. When Virgil passed away two days before the event, Benji B had to consider the music in a different light. "When I hear the song now, it's cemented into that experience," says Benji B. "In many ways that's a difficult memory, but in other ways, it's a very positive one." Virgil, no doubt, would approve.

Benji B says of Elmiene's debut, "It was so unusual to hear a first song that strong."



PHOTOGRAPH OF ELMIENE: CHARLIE SANSFIELD; GROOMING BY ALEXIS DAY USING TOM FORD AND AVEDA HAIRCARE.

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Shake up your drinks cabinet with The London No. 1 Gin, a standout spirit that serves tradition and innovation in equal measure.

THE EXPLOSION OF the gin market over the past few years has taken the drinks industry by storm, resulting in an almost bewildering array of new brands, all clamouring to offer a different take on this classic spirit. But forget those with gimmicky flavourings or dubious ingredients, and turn instead to a heritage brand that prides itself on quality.

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The result is a spirit that combines international flavours – Croatian juniper, almonds from Greece, Moroccan coriander,



The London No. 1 Gin is best enjoyed by those who appreciate depth of flavour.

Indian nutmeg – with a distinctly English identity. The grain is grown in Norfolk and Suffolk; it is produced at Thames Distillers in London; and the bottle proudly bears the outline of Tower Bridge in a nod to the spices that once arrived in the capital by ship and were stored in riverside warehouses.

But perhaps most remarkable of all is its distinctive colour: a pale-blue hue that looks supremely striking in your drinks cabinet and is another clever nod to the spirit's history, referencing a time before the invention of filtering, which removed the cloudy, blue-ish tint that gin often had. Of course, The London No. 1 Gin is ultra-clean yet has managed to retain this quirky detail as a further point of difference to set it

apart from other super-premium gins. Meanwhile, the particular blend of 12 botanicals that make up The London No. 1 Gin make it a connoisseur's gin – spicy yet smooth, delicate yet aromatic, best enjoyed by those who appreciate depth and complexity of flavour, and as such, it's only found in the most exclusive bars and retailers. Pure enough to enjoy on the rocks, bold enough to hold its own in a cocktail, The London No. 1 Gin is a drink to linger over.

Find it at select retailers – Selfridges, Partridges, Ocado, Soho Wine Supply – and premier London venues including The Twenty Two, The Goring, Rosewood London and Galvin at Windows.

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The Story of a Man's Face

2020 was a year of big change for the poet William Keohane. He moved in with friends, started taking testosterone, and watched as his face reshaped into a different form. Now he reflects on who he, and others, saw in his changing self. By WILLIAM KEOHANE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIELE FUMMO

JULY/AUGUST 2022 GQ 61



YOU MIGHT KNOW this feeling. You're in a bar with friends, having fun, and a little drunk. You get up to make your way towards the toilets. As you open the door, you look up at the mirror, and catch sight of a refracted, blurry image of yourself, and for a moment, you wonder: who is that guy?

Only it's you, of course it's you, you know that grin, you know those eyes. The room is spinning slightly, you feel a bit uneasy as you piece the puzzle of your reflection back together into a solid image.

This is how it felt for me, for about a year or so, as the changes from testosterone slowly began to settle in my body, and the face that I had known reshaped itself into a different form.

I started testosterone in January 2020. Eight weeks later, we went into lockdown and I moved in with a group of friends at home in Limerick, a city in the southwest of Ireland.

I had shared houses before, but never with friends. The timing was perfect; it just so happened that we all needed to find a place to live. It took us a while, and after a few letdowns, Eloise and I went to view a house on the edge of town. It was old, with threadbare carpets and poor insulation, but it was exactly what we were looking for. A place we could put our stamp on. Each of us had claimed the bedroom we wanted before we'd even signed the lease.

We moved in. Together, we did the usual lockdown activities. We baked bread, planted herbs and vegetables, rearranged the furniture in every room. Our 78-year-old neighbour came knocking with a box of chocolates and a bag of home-grown strawberries. A black-and-white cat soon claimed our house as theirs.

We settled in and made it a home. Someone in the house had a Polaroid camera, so we took photographs of each other, and tacked them up on our kitchen wall; group photos, portraits, snapshots from the day we moved in, the string of birthday parties over the summer, our first Halloween as a household, all of us in costume.

At times, now, when we're sitting together at the table having dinner, we will look at them and someone will say how much we have all changed. The past two years have been difficult. We have lost family; others have got



sick. We are, and we seem to be, older. My housemate Brendan shaved his head when we first moved in together, but two years on, his hair long and thick again, he has grown a moustache, too. Eloise's hair was waist-length at the start. Now, it reaches just past her shoulders. One summer night, Annie and Emily both had undercuts at the kitchen table, our makeshift barber-shop. At this point, most of us are quite handy with the hair clippers.

We all look different, but my face has undoubtedly changed the most. The changes caused by hormone therapy vary from person to person. So in

many ways, hormones are a guessing game. You can never be sure what will happen, what won't, what you'll end up looking like. I was nervous about this, of course. I wanted to look different, more masculine. But I didn't want to look like a stranger to myself.

There were changes I anticipated. At 21, I was essentially going through puberty all over again, so I had some trouble with my skin, spots and oiliness. My face grew wider and rounder. It took a while before it settled into something familiar. For the better part of a year, every time I looked in a mirror, I didn't feel like I was looking at



my own face. I was quite slight, so the clinic put me on a low dose of testosterone to start with. My nurse told me that testosterone often leads to weight gain, with an increase in both muscle mass and body fat. Even though I was prepared and informed, I didn't anticipate how much my body composition would change. In the middle of lockdown, I was getting broader, and bigger, and I was relieved that these changes were finally happening, but I didn't have any shirts or trousers that fitted me properly. With shops closed, there was no way to try on clothes and I didn't know my size because it kept changing.

I was sitting in the living room one evening when Brendan came in. "I have some old clothes I was going to drop into a charity shop in town," he said. "Do you want to have a look and see if there's anything that would fit you?"

I took some of the clothes he was planning to donate. I still wear them now, even though I know what size I am, and I can easily try clothes on in stores. The pair of faded black denim jeans with a small bleach stain near the pocket. The thin, grey, long-sleeved shirt from River Island. They are some of my favourite things to wear, because they were so necessary at the time, and because they were a gift.

All the men in my family – my dad, my uncle, my cousin – have beards, so I hoped that I would be able to grow one too, but like everything else, there was no way of knowing if or when it would happen. It came in slowly, and then, one October, arrived all at once, as if my face was preparing to keep warm for the winter.

I taught myself how to shave the coarse hairs that were growing on my chin, my neck, and above my lips – I wasn't sure, at this point, if I could ask my friends for advice, to show me how to do it, if asking for help would make me less of a man in their eyes – so I watched a video on YouTube. I was instructed to trim my neckline by finding my Adam's apple, positioning my finger atop the ridge, and shaving the space below.

After a year or so, my voice had fully dropped, but an Adam's apple wasn't something I was expecting or watching out for. A friend noticed it, she took a photograph so I could see it, and there it was; my neck in shadow, and midway down, a little bulb of light. Because I never thought that it would happen, it's one of the changes I love the most. I can see it in the mirror, I can feel for it; I swallow and it moves beneath my thumb. Touch reminds me it is real, I haven't made it up. It's like the seed of something growing. It blooms anew each time I eat, or drink, or speak.

Of course, not all men will have a pronounced Adam's apple, or a strong jawline. Not everyone will be able to grow a full beard. Some men do have softer features. Before starting testosterone I was constantly anxious about how I was being perceived, but whenever I saw other men with features similar to my own, I never thought they looked excessively feminine. All my scrutiny was self-directed. Looking at myself in the mirror, I would wonder: what is it about me that isn't masculine enough, and how can I conceal it?

AS A TEENAGER I had my nose pierced – it was my first small act of rebellion (we weren't allowed piercings at secondary school). The lead singer of my favourite band, Daughter, had a nose piercing, and when I first heard their song "Landfill" at the age of 16, it was instant adoration. I saw them in concert four times. The album they signed for me is framed and hanging above the dresser in my bedroom, even now. It is an enduring love.

One night, a few years later, while I was brushing my teeth, I decided that I had to take the ring out. It was worried that a small piece of jewellery might mean the difference between being read correctly as a man or being misgendered. Back then, I changed a lot about myself, as much as I could. I kept my hair as short as possible. I kept my head down. When I spoke, I forced my voice into a lower, deeper register. I wore a binder every day. Just

as Brendan gave me his old clothes, after I had top surgery I was able to give my binders to another trans man I knew in Limerick, who was also waiting and saving up to have surgery abroad.

It has taken me a long time to be seen in the world as a man. I worried that if I talk about aesthetics, or beauty, it would feminise me, and I wouldn't be legitimate any more. My guy friends didn't talk about their appearance that much. They rarely, if ever, took pictures of themselves. Before nights out, when the girls aired their insecurities (Does this look okay? Should I change?) the others would hype them up and help while the guys would stand at the front door with their hands in their pockets. Men seemed to deal with issues around their appearance privately.

As I grew more comfortable in myself, I started to open up with my guy friends, and noticed changes in them, too. When my beard started to appear, I was nervous that it would be forever patchy. So I asked my friends for tips (How do you take care of your beard? How long did it take for it to fully grow in?) and they brought up their own insecurities. They worried about the gaps in their beard, or their hairlines, and all of them said they were afraid of going bald.

The more I spoke to my friends about the issues around self-image that I was dealing with, the more they opened up. One of my friends is anxious about the redness in his skin. Another worries about the visibility of his acne scars. What I've learned from the men I know is that they feel many different ways about their bodies, but often struggle for the language, or the invitation to speak openly about the aspects of their appearance they are uncomfortable with, and what they like about themselves and how they look.

Growing up, I hated having curly hair, and when I couldn't cut it short, I tried to keep it hidden by tying it up. It's something I embrace now; I have my mum to thank for my soft, sometimes unruly, curls.

I like a lot of things about my face. I like how much I resemble my father. We looked alike before, but now it's uncanny. From old photographs, I can see that my beard is the same colour and shape as his when he was my age.

When restrictions were lifted, I went home to visit my parents without shaving for the first time. My dad was cutting the grass, so I went round to the side gate and he saw me, stalled the mower, and said: "Well, you've gone awful scruffy."

But he told me he liked it, that it suited me, and that he might even be a bit jealous, since his own beard was now fully white. Ageing is just another change that we learn to live with. I like

"I like how much I resemble my father. We looked alike before but now it's uncanny. From photos I can see my beard is the same shape and colour as his when he was my age."



that I can see my future in his face. Now, I can look at my father and see a version of what lies ahead, and it's something I look forward to.

It's not just a resemblance with my dad. I'm told how much I look like other men. Recently, at a bar, a woman I had just met told me I looked like Paul Mescal from *Normal People*, and I've thought about it, oh, every day since. It wasn't meant as a chat-up line, but it certainly would have worked as one. It's a flattering comparison; the actor and that gold chain have become sex symbols. Her comment was meaningful in another way, too. Paul Mescal looks like a typical Irish guy, and this wasn't something I thought I'd ever be able to achieve. I am references of other people, not quite myself yet, but I don't mind this. I am still settling in.

My face is different to how it used to be, but it still bears a resemblance. Earlier this year I was at a Galway literary festival. On the Friday night I went to a bar after a reading by Shon Faye, a transgender author I deeply admire.

Inside, I recognised a girl I had gone to school with. We hadn't spoken in eight years. A lot had changed. I wasn't sure if she knew. For a while, after I became broader, bearded and wearing mostly Brendan's clothes, I felt a bit like a ghost in my hometown. I would see people around that I knew, but they wouldn't see me. It was a sort of invisibility. If no one recognised me, I could walk right past them. I wouldn't have to explain myself. I wouldn't have to wait for their reaction.

Now, I could see that she was trying to place me, looking towards me, then away. Something felt different about this night. Enough time had passed, I figured I could handle her response and I knew there were other trans people around that I could speak to if things didn't go so well. I decided to wave at her, and I started walking over. Everything clicked as I moved in her direction, and her face broke into a smile. "William!" she said.

"How have you been?" I asked her, taken aback by her calling me by my name. We talked about Galway, she lived there now, I explained why I was visiting. She never knew me as William at school, but news travels.

Whatever conversations were had about me, I'm glad that someone let her know. And I am glad that my face is still, in ways, recognisable. That it holds the blueprint of my past.



I HOPED THAT by starting testosterone, my life would get easier, more liveable. It has. I'm no longer afraid to enter men's toilets. I have managed to blend well. I pass. That is, people perceive me, correctly, as a man. I run a support group for trans people in Limerick. When we go out, we stick together so that one of us isn't singled out by a bouncer. When someone goes to the toilet, we will wait for them outside the cubicles. Not all trans people want to pass – some intentionally present their gender in ways that don't conform to masculine and feminine norms – but it is often necessary for survival.

I am lucky that I don't have to worry as much any more. Recently, I had my nose pierced again. This isn't a big, or important, feature of my face. But it's a sign that I'm less afraid now, I feel like I am able to present myself how I want to, not how I feel that I should.

I'm still not fully used to how I look. I've made it through the awkwardness of puberty, for the second time. Like most men, my hairline is receding, a less favourable side effect of testosterone. I feel like there's an expectation for me to say *I'm on testosterone, and it solved everything. I love the way I look.* But who among us can say that?

And I want to tell you how I feel

about my face, but it's something I'm still learning, so I find myself searching for metaphors.

My face is a paragraph I have edited, one that I don't remember writing. I re-read it in the mirror daily and it changes in meaning. It will keep changing; my relationship with my face, like everyone else's, is something that will evolve.

And if I say my face feels like a piece of writing, then I'll probably look back and think it's a bit embarrassing. Or maybe I'll look back and think, it was quite good, for what it was, at the time.

When I speak about transition, I can only speak to my own experience, and I cannot separate my face from the rest of my body, which has also changed a lot since I started testosterone.

For me, transition was always about a feeling. For a long time, my body felt like a flat I was renting. It was never quite right. But it's a home, now. One I have refurbished and I feel I can decorate. It doesn't matter so much what it looks like. What matters is if it's comfortable and safe. There are still a few, small, troublesome things, but they're no big deal, they are okay. The walls are chipped a bit, I need to sweep the floors.

It's fine. I like it here. This is where I am supposed to live. ❧

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The

Aventurine is the latest material in horology to channel out-of-this-world vibes.

By HSIAO YING TIEN

Other

Quartz

Watch

T

HESE DAYS, whether a conversation is about a wavy fashion moment or a luxury car collab, NFTs inevitably come up. Even Swiss watchmakers – conservative to their cores – are dipping their toes into the intergalactic digital playground. There's a real likelihood of buying a watch in the future that comes with a thin card and QR code, rather than a physical box.

For the time being, some Swiss watchmakers are entering the boundlessness of the watch 'universe' by using goldstone, or aventurine glass. Aventurine has long been sought after by top collectors because of its dreamy visual qualities. Its trademark characteristic is the flecks of gold, copper and other metals it adds to glass, which sparkle against a dark field. Aventurine dials have become a distinct horological flex, increasingly being paired with original designs that incorporate the advanced technology, as shown in this selection of way-out creations.

Movement



**PIAGET ALTIPLANO:
TOURBILLON HIGH
JEWELLERY**

Through the 1960s and '70s, Piaget was famed for watches and jewellery, known for using precious and semiprecious stones like agate, turquoise and tiger's eye for its dials. This new watch (a limited edition of 38) uses aventurine glass and moves the time display from the centre of the dial to 8 o'clock, freeing up more space for the aventurine to dazzle with its galactic-level reflections. Looks aside, the 670P ultra-thin hand-wound tourbillon movement is a mechanical masterpiece composed of 157 components, some of which are thinner than human hair. Jewellery watches like this one (the 18-carat white-gold case is set with 12 brilliant-cut diamonds) used to be seen as too flamboyant for men. No more. Between those diamonds, the aventurine dial, and the alligator strap, this is a reference for you at your most glamorous.

£116,500



H. MOSER & CIE: ENDEAVOUR PERPETUAL MOON CONCEPT AVENTURINE

With concept pieces – whether watches or cars – brands usually strive to show off their most wild and far-off visions of the future: say, a large, self-winding minute repeater or a car battery that runs 200 miles on a half-hour charge. But H. Moser & Cie seems to have little interest in conforming to norms, with the only bit of flash on this watch being the moonphase window at 6 o'clock. The watchmaker has even gone so far as to erase its own brand logo, preferring an air of understated anonymity. Many collectors describe Moser as the Apple of the watch industry: minimalist and discerning, with a rabid and loyal fanbase. Call it a different definition of luxury.

£32,765



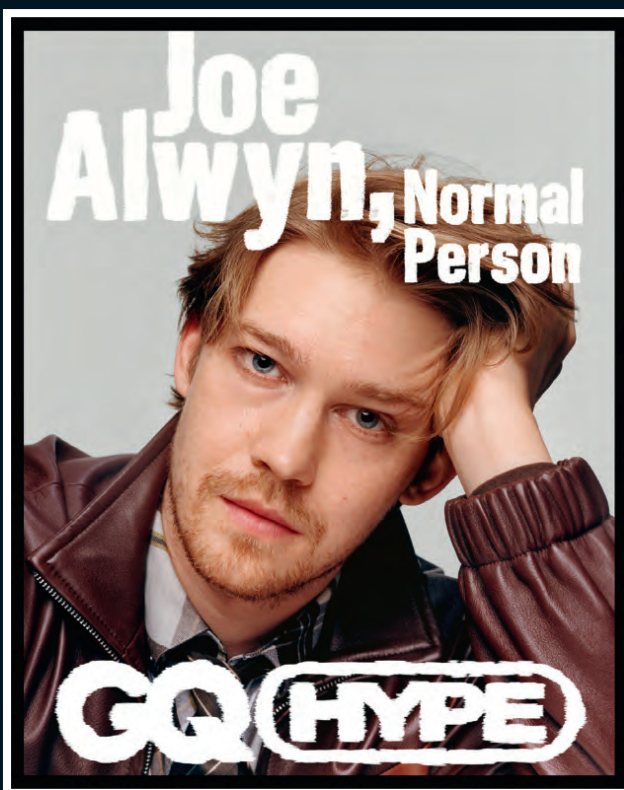
ULYSSE NARDIN: FREAK X AVENTURINE

To the most hardcore watch enthusiasts, Ulysse Nardin's Freak X line is one of the most iconic and unique collections out there. The Freak X is the brand's most talked-about model, and leans heavily on Ulysse Nardin's technical prowess. The large flying carousel – it rotates once an hour, replacing the hour hand's function – has no dial or hands, a feature that's made it popular since it debuted 19 years ago. In one of the latest releases, Ulysse Nardin has gone the extra mile with an oversized silicon balance wheel and an aventurine dial, which resembles the night sky when the watch is in motion.

£30,740



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The most compelling new designers in Europe are reimagining what menswear means right now. We scoured the continent to meet them. By TEO VAN DEN BROEKE



NEW DESIGNERS RADICALLY REDEFINING MENSWEAR

PHOTOGRAPH: MAGLIANO.



In Alessandro Michele's first show for Florentine super brand Gucci in winter 2015, the designer sent out an army of lithe men draped in pussy-bow shirts, tops made of vintage lace and Sloane Ranger-worthy pie crust-collar shirts. It wasn't menswear as we knew it, but a moment where we witnessed where it could go. A place where the old rules didn't apply. Where gender was fluid. Where menswear was a wide-open space, full of creativity and progressive thinking.

Since then, the boundaries of menswear have softened. Smaller brands were next to explore genderlessness and a rule-breaking mode has gained pace since, thanks to a flamboyance of fabulously dressed male stars (see Harry Styles and A\$AP Rocky) and a surfeit of young designers who have broken through the veil of the fashion industry with the purpose of redefining what it means to dress like a man.

What does that mean for you and your wardrobe? Something very exciting, as it turns out. From the 'skirt and platform shoe'-infused alt-Britishness of Stefan Cooke, to the genderless neo-punk of French designer Egonlab, it's this continent's boldest young creatives who are leading the charge towards a more interesting, boundary-free future.

STEFAN COOKE

British Classics Subverted

BY
TEO VAN DEN BROEKE

FEW DESIGNERS HAVE embraced menswear's bold new gender fluid mood with more wearable success than young British label Stefan Cooke. The creative brainchild of designer Cooke and his partner Jake Burt, the pair showed their first collection as part of MAN (London Fashion Week Men's designer incubator programme) in winter 2017 and have since made a name for themselves with uncompromisingly genderless collections which pay close attention to clever fabrication.

"The thing we focus on most is working with textiles," says Burt. "There's contrast in everything and that contrast is demonstrated in the way we subvert the classics. Though it's true that a lot of designers work that way, our method is specific because we source those classic things from car-boot sales and charity shops. We physically find things ourselves. Consequently our clothes look like something you'd find in

a charity shop – clothes which were designed a long time ago," he says. "They fit into history, which is kind of the aim."

Said clothes include knitted sweaters finished with cut-out origami sections which have become one of the brand's trademark pieces; tartan coats and bomber jackets with built-in pleated skirts – part Sloaney pinafores, part punky tunics – and platform boat shoes imbued with a similarly genderless appeal.

"When I look at the clothes – the stuff that the media instantly defines as 'challenging masculinity', the skirt silhouettes and bustles, for instance – it's less about us being interested in the notion of masculinity and more because of the research we've looked at," says Burt. "We didn't set out to redefine what it means to dress like a man, it just happened. The good thing is that as a small brand, we don't have to think about catering to everyone. Our customer is a fashion-

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DESIGNERS: STEFAN COOKE & JAKE BURT

The London-based partners in life and business evolved a brand that's all about attention to detail, historical fabrication and gender as an afterthought.

forward guy with a small-ish seasonal budget and he doesn't care about wearing a skirt or a dress, fem shoes or whatever."

It's this focus on creating highly wearable designs produced with God-level attention to detail – rather than mere headline-grabbing pieces – which sets Cooke's work apart. It's also what makes the creative duo's creations so appealing to the men who wear them. Last year, A\$AP Rocky wore a black denim jacket from the pair's autumn-winter 2021 collection, while LVMH prize judge Nicolas Ghesquière was taken with the pair's work when they were nominated in 2019. Cooke and Burt have also entered the meta realm – last year, they created a digital collection for The Sims.

"Working with The Sims was insane," laughs Burt. "The team is such an amazing group of people. They would do anything we asked. Stefan and I are painfully analogue – we still draw everything to scale on paper and send it to factories – so having someone to show us how to do digital things was invaluable. It was like that meme of the 100-year-old woman seeing a video of her 22-year-old self dancing for the first time."

Cooke and Burt are deservedly proud of their achievements – but what's next for the brand? "Survival is our hope for the future," says Burt. "I want to find a way of defining our own path and not worrying about the future. We are getting more confident each season, and I want to appreciate all those things which make our day-to-day work nice."



THE PIECE TO BUY:

Polido leather platform loafers, £365.





MAGLIANO

Ripping up the Rulebook, with Gusto

BY
JACOPO BEDUSSI

OF THE WORLD'S most important fashion capitals, Milan is most closely associated with a specifically codified idea of masculinity. Rooted in history and tradition, the clothes which Milanese and Italian men wear are influenced by the golden age of Cinecittà, Florentine dandyism, and the hedonistic effervescence of Milan in the 1980s – when broad-shouldered and dagger-sharp tailoring matched the testosterone-driven mood.

In recent years, a new wave of Milan-based designers – the oldest of them still only Millennials – has challenged these longstanding sartorial codes and traditions: questioning them, upending them, and pushing them, all the while channelling an irreverent attitude to the work and wardrobes of their forefathers.

Foremost among these is Luca Magliano. The 35 year old leads the eponymous brand he founded in 2016. Season after season, Magliano rewrites and expands the boundaries

of what has long been defined as an “Italian masculine identity”. In his spring-summer 2021 collection, roomy suit jackets – the kind you’d see on the elegantly appointed streets of Milan’s Via Gesù – were shown in shades of chartreuse, worn with T-shirts and/or inside out, revealing their inner workings. Syrupy palazzo pants in pastel shades were worn with sheer cycling short-style girdles, and silk shirts in lime with white kipper ties.

“I have never thought of Magliano as a men’s collection, it is rather a collection dedicated to the male wardrobe,” says Magliano. “For me, masculinity is a stereotypical language, a system of justifications. When I realised I couldn’t fully access that language and I couldn’t internalise it, I decided to use it as a disguise. My men are always in drag.”

Magliano is both an artist and a designer. “In my work, I talk about my experience because from the very beginning, since I was a child,



DESIGNER:
LUCA MAGLIANO

By playing with the wardrobe fundamentals, Magliano’s relationship with Italian masculinity unfolds through garments that both challenge and embrace what it means to be classically male.



I realised that I did not conform to the idea of masculinity,” he explains. “I was obviously homosexual even before I knew how to say the word out loud. So the recommendations I was given as a child about my role and how to be male sometimes felt like torture but they also became a game.”

Magliano now plays the fashion game in his singular style. “I put clothes together as if they were words, with the aim of producing a poetic sentence, or a polemical sentence, or an ironic sentence,” he says. “Sentence after sentence, and chapter after chapter, I want to rewrite the rules of the game, filled with wild cards. That is Italian masculinity.”

THE PIECE TO BUY:

Yellow Acid Sweater, £590.



EGONLAB

Tailoring, but make it Genderless Neo-Punk

BY
ADRIEN COMMUNIER

LAUNCHING A FASHION brand is a complicated enterprise. Launching one on the eve of a global pandemic, however, is a whole other level. But Egonlab, founded by French duo Florentin Glémarec and Kévin Nompeix in 2019, has enjoyed success despite launching in wild times. Partners in life as well as business – they met at Success Models in Paris where Nompeix still works as a model agent – the pair have managed to establish themselves, after only a few seasons, as one of the most promising labels on the French scene.

The neo-punk aesthetic injected by the duo into the collections they have presented so far has been key to their success. Their designs suggest the revival of sartorial style, where traditional garments evolve and are updated to move away from the polite codes of the past. “Tailoring is at the heart of the brand and it’s very important to us,” says Glémarec, explaining that Egonlab has found its signature silhouette. “It’s a mix of a structured jacket, a skirt and bootcut trousers,” he says. And the couple’s goal? “To show that tailoring is not just for a small minority of professionals,” says Nompeix, smiling.

While the couple focuses on clothes, a whole brand ecosystem has developed via a collective of artists – hence the name Egonlab – who work on video and sound projects, fantastical virtual environments and motion design. “It has become a bit complicated to think that a fashion brand should only be judged based on its clothes,” says Nompeix. “Today there has to be a message, a culture.”

Family is a key plank of that Egonlab culture. And a key moment in the brand’s story came in early 2020 by way of Glémarec’s grandparents. “They would come to the studio to try on the clothes and joke around

suggesting that they too could be models,” Glémarec explains. Eventually, the octogenarian couple found themselves posing for street-style photographers during Paris Fashion Week. The pictures went around the world. “We wouldn’t be where we are today if there hadn’t been this media buzz about my grandparents,” he says

In addition to press acclaim, Egonlab won the Pierre Bergé prize in the ANDAM competition 2021, which recognises promising fashion talent. The prize was a financial boost that helped the duo mount their first in-person show since the pandemic, in January. It was a moment to see their vision out in the world. “Fashion is a living spectacle where you have to see the garment move,” says Nompeix, “and producing our show is always very emotional.”



DESIGNERS:
FLORENTIN
GLÉMAREC &
KÉVIN NOMPEIX

The award-winning couple turn to the past to infuse traditional style with modern sensibilities, by way of an arts collective and model grandparents.

**THE PIECE TO
BUY:**

Organic wool-blend
jupe culottes, £330.



3



LML STUDIO

Couture Worthy of Berghain

BY
MANUELA HAINZ

LUCAS MEYER-LECLÈRE creates wearable works of art in his Berlin-based LML Studio, combining couturier expertise with a mindful consideration for the environment. The designer deconstructs, assembles, paints and decorates already-existing garments to create unique pieces – wholly new works of art that can't be duplicated.

"It's a dialogue between me and the fabrics," says Meyer-Leclère, who uses pieces from his own wardrobe and vintage finds to inform his designs. "It's like boarding a train and not knowing where it stops." The process of creating is also an adventure. "It's slicing and painting, braiding things and embroidering

them," he explains, "which transforms them into something different."

The couture aspect of Meyer-Leclère's work comes through via the craft and sensitivity he builds into each piece. Every garment is one of a kind. "There is a very strong focus on tailoring," says the designer, who used to get his own suits made on Savile Row. "There is a lot of deconstruction and reconstruction."

All of the pieces in Meyer-Leclère's collections have different fits and finishing. He paints everything himself with a variety of pigments to create "a look that's rich visually but not bourgeoisie." After studies at Central Saint Martins, Meyer-Leclère was hired by Karl Lagerfeld to design



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DESIGNER:
LUCAS MEYER-LECLÈRE

An expert in hand-painting and stirring the status quo through individual identity, all Meyer-Leclère's pieces are made using existing garments, making each one unique.

fabrics for Chanel, where he learned fine crafts at the ateliers and the hand-painting techniques he uses in his collections. His designs are arguably more unique than couture – all pieces exist only in one size. Or as Meyer-Leclère simply calls it: "A new take on luxury, a new take on couture."

This manifests in striking, singular fashion. A vintage leather jacket is painted over with strokes, resulting in a pattern designed to represent the scourge of the HIV-AIDS virus. For a show created in collaboration with Berlin techno DJ Nicolas Maxim Endlicher, Meyer-Leclère used the piece and the wider Painted Love collection to "shed light on the stigmatisation of HIV and how people with the virus are still perceived in our society today. I dressed all my friends in the show," Meyer-Leclère says. "It was an ideal fantasy of day and nightlife."

Meyer-Leclère brings subtle sex to the catwalk: models in short shorts and high heels, naked torsos that leave the gender to the eye of the beholder. "What excites me the most in fashion is diversity," he explains. "Western fashion has changed and evolved in a way that has freed men and women from gender. Now we have the power to push and develop this new masculinity."



THE PIECE TO BUY:

Cut-away trousers, £1,234.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY AND LML STUDIO MBFW BY NOWADAYS.



5



DESIGNER:
ARCHIE ALLED-MARTINEZ

Martinez gives knitwear the couture craftsmanship treatment, inviting wearers to push the boundaries of materials, gender and everything in between.



WE TEND TO THINK of avant-garde fashion as gimmicky – silly even – but that label is not applicable to the work of Archie Alled-Martinez, whose seasonal collections pay homage to the dandy motto of “conspicuously inconspicuous” and takes showing-off to subversive new highs. “I don’t believe in an over-designed or unreal product. Innovation must start in the cut,” Alled-Martinez says. “I stand by fearless masculinity and I avoid falling into unnecessary flourishes. For me, it is important to create a desirable empowered man.”

Alled-Martinez’s creative essence is in the harmony of extremes: his fashion training was rigorous – he graduated from Central Saint Martins – and his references include such *enfants terribles* as Walter Albini, Jacques de Bascher, Margo Channing and Andrea Casiraghi. “For me, rigour is the main element when working on a piece,” he explains. “I always respect the traditional codes of the garment but I give them a twist, and to achieve that the most important thing is to do historical research and

ALLED-MARTINEZ

Fierce and Fearless New Masculinity

BY
F. JAVIER GIRELA

distil the design until you are left with the purest form of it.” From there, says Alled-Martinez, you get naughty. “This nuance of something elevated or sophisticated that you allow yourself to mistreat, as these *enfants terribles* do, got me,” he says. “We always work around this concept, as we did for the autumn-winter 2022 collection: a preppy boy with a slightly perverse and even kinky side.”

All this manifested in Alled-Martinez’s CSM graduate collection, which earned him the LVMH Prize for Graduates award in 2018 and captured the eye of Harry Styles (the singer wore one of Alled-Martinez’s sexy ’70s-inspired jumpsuits for the Jingle Bell Ball of 2019). On the one hand, there was traditional tailoring designed to be worn like tracksuits, on the other, there was knitwear elevated to couture.

Each piece was sprinkled with the porn-chic aesthetic first devised by Tom Ford and Carine Roitfeld, Alled-Martinez’s godmother. “I grew up surrounded by that imagery,” he says. “What does Alled-Martinez bring to

the table?” he considers. “Sexual freedom and gender diversity, which I think was a pending issue at that time. Fashion is pure politics, and ignorance can lead to marginality, therefore I feel forced to use it as a speaker for my LGBTQ community.”

Alled-Martinez’s clothes are the megaphone and the message. Among his more retro-looking creations we can spot phallic symbols – hidden, perhaps, in a traditional bandana – while football-inspired shirts are, in fact, a tribute to the lost AIDs generation of the 1980s. The sweatshirts in his latest collection were a vehicle to “fight the bottom shaming and toxic masculinity that exists within our community”.



THE PIECE TO BUY:

Pepo Moreno x Alled-Martinez Revolt for Them T-shirt, £107.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY AND ALLED-MARTINEZ.

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Jeff Koons' New BMW is Top of the Pops

The stunning, special-edition BMW M850i xDrive Gran Coupé is sure to be a smash hit all over the world.



The world-famous American pop artist has designed his dream car, which is called 'The 8 X Jeff Koons'.

BEFORE WE TELL you what this car is, we are going to start with what it isn't. Despite what you may be thinking, this is not a

BMW Art Car. Yes, it was unveiled at the Frieze Los Angeles art fair in early 2022. Yes, it was created by world-famous American artist Jeff Koons. And yes, back in 2010, Koons did create the 17th BMW Art Car using an M3 GT2 as his automotive canvas. But it is not a one-off. It is not a BMW racing car. And it is not going to spend the rest of its life as an exhibit in the company's museum near the Olympiapark in Munich, or as part of a touring display. This is something else. Something exceptional. This is Jeff Koons' dream car.

"I've wanted to create a special-edition BMW for a long time," the artist said upon its unveiling. "It is sporty and flashy as well as minimalist and conceptual. I can't wait to drive it and ride in it, and I hope that people will enjoy the Gran Coupé as much as I do."

Unfortunately, most people won't get to enjoy this M850i xDrive Gran Coupé masterpiece quite as much as Koons. Only 99 examples of this "pop art meets high performance" 8 Series are being produced, and one of those already has Koons' name on it – both artistically and literally. And, of course, he gets to keep one.

"I could have worked with a two-door sports model, but one of the reasons that I was really excited about working on the Gran Coupé was because it's a four-door car," Koons said during an interview at Frieze. "I have a large family, including my wife and eight children. And I like being with people. So, I designed a car which would heighten this shared experience." That means only 98 are up for grabs. Not quite as rare as an Art Car, but still.

According to the chairman of the board of management of BMW AG, this in no way diminishes the artistic achievement. "BMW thrives on constantly seeking out new challenges," Oliver Zipse explained. "Never before in the history of our company has a BMW been created with such an extensive design effort as The 8 X Jeff Koons. [It is] a 'rolling sculpture' that will not only be displayed as a coveted collector's item in museums, but will also be allowed to flourish on the road as a genuine BMW."

For inspiration, however, Koons didn't shy away from BMW's Art Car history. Dating back to 1975, when French racing driver Hervé Poulain asked American sculptor Alexander Calder to give his BMW 3.0 CSL a makeover, over the years 19 different



international designers have taken up the challenge. From David Hockney and Andy Warhol, through to Esther Mahlangu and Jenny Holzer, the world's most talented modern artists have brought their four-wheeled visions to life, but Koons used the work of 1977 Art Car creator, Roy Lichtenstein, to help express his vision.

"On the car, the lines are getting bigger on their journey from the hood towards the trunk, creating a sense of forward movement just as the 'POP!' and the vapour thrust design elements do," said Koons. "The blue colour resembles the vastness of space and

Above: Koons sits behind the wheel of his Gran Coupé masterpiece. *Right and below:* The 8 X Jeff Koons is the epitome of luxury design.

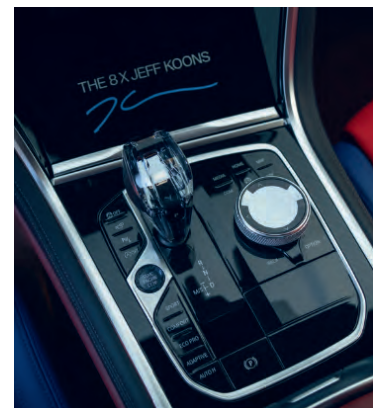
"I can't wait to drive it, and I hope that people will enjoy the Gran Coupé as much as I do." — JEFF KOONS



I like the idea of the car being a global car. What matters is how we relate to each other and our awareness of everything we are surrounded by. For the driver and all passengers, there is a heightened state of pleasure. This is what my car has to offer."

The work involved in each one is monumental. To create his striking design, Koons used 11 different colours, matching his artistic interpretation to the 8 Series' bold and beautiful shape, and its intricate, elegant contours. The sharp lines of colour on the rear are a homage to Koons' Art Car, and the comic-book 'POP!' on the back doors are there to symbolise the speed and power symbolic of BMW's top-of-the-range Gran Coupé. Each car requires more than 200 hours of exterior paint work and it is so intensive only four vehicles can be completed per week.

And the multicoloured concept continues on the car's interior. The seats



are trimmed in red and blue leather, the materials used throughout are high-end and luxurious, and no work of art would be complete without the artist's signature. But just in case no one believes you are driving The 8 X Jeff Koons, each one comes with a certificate of authentication signed by the artist himself, and Zipse. This is next-level luxury at its most flamboyant, progressive and inspiring.

"I am really thrilled and honoured about the opportunity to work with BMW again and to create a special-edition car," Koons continued. "I was thinking very intensely about it: what is the essence of the 8 Series Gran Coupé? What is the essence of power? How to create something that exemplifies all the energy of the BMW 8 Series that is also able to touch upon the human element?" It's safe to say, the results speak for themselves. Just don't call it a BMW Art Car, OK?



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There's a key player in football writing's new wave – and it's all down to Wrighty.

ARSENAL LEGEND Ian Wright looms large over the work of Calum Jacobs, the writer at the vanguard of a fresh era of football punditry. In 2017, when Jacobs launched his independent magazine *CARICOM* – which documents the intersection between the Black British experience and the beautiful game – he did so with a deep-dive essay on Wright. “Ian was arguably football’s first Black superstar,” Jacobs says. “Beyond that, his behaviour on and off the pitch widened our understanding of what Black British identity could encompass.” Wright, who remains a key figure in the game today, was a natural fit. While Jacobs is hesitant to throw around words like “representation”, he struggles for a better one to describe seeing Wright, “using Jamaican patois on *Match of the Day* in the heart of that establishment”, or passionately backing an underrated Daniel Sturridge for Euro 2016. “It was almost like a covert signal to say, you know, ‘I’m with you.’”

Wright also figures in Jacobs’ *A New Formation: How Black Footballers Shaped The Modern Game*, published this year via Stormzy’s Penguin imprint, Merky Books. The book features essays from award-winning writers Musa Okwonga and Aniefiok Ekpoudom. It’s an extension of the work Jacobs began with *CARICOM*, but on a grander scale: a groundbreaking

document of football history told through in-depth examinations of some of its most important players – like Wright, Andy Cole and England women’s international Anita Asante. Or, as *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Liew puts it, “one of the most important football books ever written”.

Jacobs made it his mission to cover ground left untouched by mainstream media, and to steer the conversation away from the traditional narratives about racism and adversity that so often follow Black footballers around. “Raheem Sterling appears [in the book], not for his work on anti-racism, but to explore his Jamaican ancestry and then to therefore explore the relationship between Britain and Jamaica. The influence that Jamaican culture has had on him, as both a man and a player is completely underexplored because the people who were sent to interview him just don’t see it.”

The book has been widely acclaimed. MP David Lammy, writing in *The Guardian*, called it “cultural expression, social history and black pride at its finest”. Wright inviting Jacobs onto his podcast, *Wrighty’s House*, was the full-circle moment. “It felt surreal, like a confirmation,” Jacobs says. “I would go so far to say, if there’s no Ian Wright there is no *CARICOM* – and no *A New Formation*...” —BEN ALLEN

Calum Jacobs





– or even be thought of as a nomination for a Golden Globe or an Emmy,” she says. “Other people had to constantly lift me up and say, ‘Girl, you’re deserving, you’re capable of it.’”

Pose’s success has knocked down the doors for inclusivity like few shows before it – Rodriguez points towards the success of young, trans actor and star of *Heartstopper* and *Doctor Who*, Yasmin Finney as one example. “When you start seeing things like that, you start to realise the effect,” she says. But even amid her personal wins – and the rousing success of *Pose* – Rodriguez remains focused on what normality in gender non-conforming stories really looks like.

“The biggest challenge is executing gender non-conforming stories and trans stories that haven’t been told that are just natural – that aren’t solely based on the title of being trans or gender non-conforming, or anything that consists of being LGBTQ+,” she says. “It’s about having us centralised in normality versus being centralised in a trope or stigma. For so long, so many people have had to fall into this box that we’re still constantly trying to break out of. We’re always trying to break the mould so that people can see us in a regular light, and so that we can, collectively, be seen equally, just like anyone else, human.”

That starts, Rodriguez says, with trans stories that go beyond struggles. “There needs to be more stories that are told of us being loved and cherished, because there are parts of our lives that are beautiful that deserve to be seen so younger individuals can know that, okay, this is possible.”

MICHAELA JAÉ RODRIGUEZ

The *Pose* star and Golden Globe winning actor is making her presence felt.

MICHAELA JAÉ RODRIGUEZ is still learning to take up space. The actor did not understand the power of *Pose*, the groundbreaking FX series that put trans women of colour front and centre of its ballroom scene drama, when it first aired in 2018. “I didn’t know when we first started that it would hit the way it did,” she says, “but it happened at the right time, with all the political and racial injustices that were going on. It really pushed a movement forward for people not only in the LGBTQ+ community, but specifically, trans women and trans women of colour in the community.”

The show, even for a Ryan Murphy one, had outsized impact. A dramatisation of the real-world ballroom scene that provided safe space – and drag excellence – for Black and Latino queer New Yorkers in the 1980s and ’90s, *Pose* was groundbreaking for the stories it told and those it chose to tell them. Janet Mock became the first trans woman of colour to write and direct an episode, and in front of the camera, the show featured the largest trans cast in TV history.

As *Pose*’s lead, Rodriguez played Blanca, a trans woman of colour who creates an alternative home for vulnerable LGBTQ+ youth. In 2021, she was nominated for an Emmy for the role; this year she won a Golden Globe, the first trans actor to win the award. “I was so unbelieving of the possibility that a woman of colour, who was also trans, black and Latina, could actually win

Trans visibility in media and art has been on many people’s minds recently. When Kendrick Lamar dropped *Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers*, conversation quickly turned to one song, “Auntie Diaries”: the track has been seen by many as an interrogation of the Black community’s attitudes towards trans people, and includes dead-naming and misgendering. “I knew it was for the Black experience and the Black trans experience,” says Rodriguez. “It was for people in the Black community to see culturally and not for people outside of it to judge it... A lot of people – mostly a lot of individuals who are not Black – don’t understand his perspective and how he’s really trying to explain, ‘This is what happens in the Black community and this is how we can fix it.’ He’s doing it through his musical art.”

Our conversation turns to allyship – and this is where Rodriguez punctuates her points. “When I said you can’t be an ally simply by just standing by, what I really meant was you can’t just say you’re an ally, then [watch],” she says. “The best part of being a trans woman and a woman of colour, is that it’s beautiful to be in presence. And people knowing you’re trans and knowing your presence alone [is powerful]. It’s simply walking into a room and into a space that is maybe not accepting of you, but you’re taking up the space, and showing respect to everyone else – and making sure that you demand respect from them as well.”

—JOSEPHINE JUDD



WHEN BEATRICE LAU was 17, her dad gave her a second-hand guitar. Based in West London, the Filipino-British teenager was at the lowest point of a low few years: she had been kicked out of school after a lifetime of feeling like an outsider. But the instrument became a kind of salvation to her sadness. Lau was glued to YouTube tutorials, teaching herself how to play and, shortly thereafter, uploading music under the moniker 'beabadoobee' – a silly play on her name, quickly chosen because she never really expected anyone to pay attention to her songs.

That's not how things played out: the first song she wrote, "Coffee" – a sweet ballad that sways in sepia tones – blew up after she put it out in 2017. (It spiked again in 2020 after being sampled on a track by Canadian rapper Powfu, becoming a sleeper hit on TikTok and leading to her first chart success). "The fact that that song has gotten so much attention from people that I never imagined would listen to my music otherwise, is crazy to me – not least because this was never a planned thing," she says. "It was overwhelming, but it's given me so many opportunities."

Since then, Lau feels like she's coming into her own with her new album, *Beatopia*. Named after a fictional world she created as a child to escape into, its release comes at a time of self-actualisation for Lau. "It feels so special, it's a feeling I've never felt before with a piece of music I've created," she says. "I feel like I'm gonna live in this world forever, I feel like I'm gonna talk about this record forever." This makes sense when you hear the scope and ambition of the record. *Beatopia* moves past her more introspective work, and into new realms: collaborating with close friend and touring guitarist, Jacob Bugden, as well as The 1975's Matty Healy and Bombay Bicycle Club's Jack Steadman to create a vast sonic world. It's a record that flies through genres, imbued with everything from the lo-fi she's known for, to licks of bossa nova, nods to hip-hop, and a dollop of folksy sweetness, replete with violins, lithe vocals and lyrics that feel like they're holding you.

Just a few years since "Coffee", beabadoobee has become one of the most lauded names in guitar music, and *Beatopia* looks likely to keep her star on the rise. It's no mean feat in a critical landscape where the "is guitar music dead?" conversation crops up regularly, but it is particularly notable for a young woman of Asian heritage. "As annoying as it is, you have to talk about these things," Lau says. "It's annoying having to talk about being a 'female musician' when we're just fucking musicians, but also you have to inspire girls if we want to get to a point where we don't have to talk about it any more. Yes, I'm making music, but I am also an Asian woman, and I would like to think that I inspire girls that look like me to pick up the guitar."

On *Fake It Flowers*, Lau struggled with the trauma of feeling like an alien at school, and so played into being a character – channelling Scott Pilgrim's Ramona Flowers with her ever-changing roster of hair colours. On *Beatopia*, she finally feels comfortable being herself, embracing her past and becoming a beacon for anyone who's ever felt lost. "I'm still on the road of self-awareness and recovering, but I feel like I've started getting better," she smiles. "I'm finally learning how to appreciate everything in my life." —TARA JOSHI

Guitar music is alive and well in the hands of this thrilling, genre-defying star.

BEABADOOBEE



Michael Acton Smith

The CEO keeping us zen, with a little help from Harry Styles.

PUTTING ASIDE SAY, David Attenborough and *The New York Times*' podcaster Michael Barbaro, few voices would have found their way into more living rooms around the globe than that of Tamara Levitt, the voice of Calm. The guided meditation app has clocked up over 100 million downloads and as the lines between work and personal life continue to blur, it's no wonder that technology has become both problem and solution. "It was early in the days of the smartphone and social media, but we both felt that stress in the world was growing," Michael Acton Smith, who cofounded Calm with Alex Tew, told GQ of the app's beginning in 2012. "There was an opportunity to create a new type of brand that would help people take a deep breath and manage their stress."

To this, Acton Smith added a little contemporary spice, such as bedtime stories courtesy of Matthew McConaughey and Harry Styles. "We spotted fairly early on that mindfulness was this extraordinarily valuable skill that hadn't really been made accessible or simple in the west. Part of the success of Calm is doing that: making this ancient practice relatable and adding a little bit of Hollywood stardust to it."

Acton Smith co-founded his first business in 1998 at the age of 24. Six years later, he launched Mind Candy, purveyors of alternate reality phenomenon Perplex City and online game Moshi Monsters, which boasted 90 million registered users and spawned a merchandising empire. Little wonder that Acton Smith co-founded Calm as a way to help us relax and unwind.

In these anxious and "always on" times, a daily meditation practice feels less luxury, more essential – and Calm has become an entry point for millions. "I felt like I'd stumbled across a secret power," Acton Smith wrote in a blog post. "Calming the mind is not about switching off and retreating from the bustle of life. It's a superpower that rewires our brains, changes the way we see the world and helps to unlock our true potential." —DAVID TAYLOR



DOBEE

EDDIE HEARN

The sports supremo taking over the world, one fight at a time.

"WE'RE TRYING TO take over boxing on a global level," says Eddie Hearn, leaning his 6ft 4in frame forward. "That might sound a bit arrogant and a bit egotistical, but I'd rather just be honest."

A bit arrogant, a bit egotistical; all part of why Hearn is the best-known sports promoter in the world, a one-man meme machine who can claim to have done more than anyone to turn around the fortunes of this oldest of sports. After a couple of decades in the doldrums, now every YouTube and TikTok star wants to prove themselves as a boxer, while ringside and TV audiences are flocking back in record numbers.

"I wanted to make boxing sexy again," he says. "I wanted to make it a night out and an experience. I wanted you to dress up and feel like you're going to an event. We've worked hard at it."

Ten years ago, Hearn gave in to fate and joined Matchroom Promotions, the business his father founded three decades ago underneath a South London snooker club. Driven by his desire to outdo his old man, Hearn Jr has turned a million-pound business that ruled British sport into a billion-pound global enterprise.

Round one: Leigh Wood vs Michael Conlan for the WBA featherweight title in March. "That was probably the best fight that I've ever seen," says Hearn. A likeable underachiever entering the final stretch of his career, no one expected Wood to knock out the Irishman in the last second of the final round in front of a 10,000-strong hometown crowd.

Round two: Katie Taylor vs Amanda Serrano for the undisputed lightweight titles in May, otherwise known as the biggest night in women's boxing history. The two stars sold out Madison Square Garden – a first for a female fight – with 1.5m people tuning in.

"It was an iconic event, something we were told would never be possible," Hearn says of the bout that ended with his fighter, Taylor, winning a 12-round thriller on points. "Katie came into this office six years ago and tried to convince me to be part of her dream to headline Madison Square Garden. She ended up doing it, and she made over a million dollars that night as well."

Round three will be the biggest prize of them all: the world heavyweight championship battle between Britain's vanquished champ Anthony Joshua and Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk, the man who went up a weight class to spring a surprise before a sell-out Wembley crowd last year.

"The rematch will be the most important fight of Joshua's career and maybe the most important of mine," says Hearn. Joshua – a handsome, charming, marketable presence at the top of the men's game for the past 10 years – has been central to the rehabilitation of British boxing and the success of Matchroom. "He's a close friend, and I'm desperate to see him win," says Hearn.

But this fight is about far more than the fortunes of Eddie Hearn, Joshua or British boxing. In March, Usyk announced he'd be taking up arms to defend his country against Russia. The world heavyweight boxing champ was joining the frontline, along with several of his compatriots from the sport. Even if Usyk was to survive the war, the rematch with Joshua suddenly seemed trivial... until it didn't. In May, reports began to circulate that despite the escalating horrors in Europe, the biggest match in boxing was back on. "Usyk spoke to the government who gave him their blessing and said, 'You competing in an event of this magnitude is a great way to get the message out,'" says Hearn, now in the unexpected position of promoting a boxing match fraught with soft diplomatic significance. "It puts him in an ambassadorial position of fighting for his country in the ring."

It also puts Joshua in the unfamiliar position of being neither the favourite with the bookies nor the crowd. "There's a lot of sympathy, quite rightly, for the people of Ukraine," admits Hearn. "Look: we don't want the fight to go to points. The aim is to go in there and be aggressive and knock Usyk out."

Should Joshua triumph, an even bigger prize awaits: an all-British heavyweight bout between Joshua and Tyson Fury. "[It would be] the biggest fight in the history of boxing," Hearn says.

Should Joshua vs Fury come about, with sporting immortality on the line, Hearn's quest to take over boxing on a global level will seem neither arrogant nor egotistical, but a matter of fact. What people misunderstand about him, he says, is that it's a matter of personal passion, not just money. He's loved boxing since he was a kid; it's part of what makes his interviews so infectious to watch.

"It's the wildest sport in the world," he says. "You're paying people to have a fight in front of 80-90,000 fans so how can you expect it to be normal? How can you expect the people in it to be?"

"Boxing can be a horrible business. Everybody's trying to fuck you all the time. You have to sleep with one eye open. But it's also the most exciting sport in the world. When you get a night like some of those we've had this year, you don't forget that for the rest of your life. You're part of an occasion that will go down in history."

—SAM PARKER





How the co-organiser of Glastonbury turned the great British festival into an international treasure.

IN 1999, EMILY EAVIS joined the family business to assist her father, Michael, in running arguably the greatest festival on earth: Glastonbury. Now the brains behind the legendary line-ups, Eavis has shepherded Glastonbury through seismic changes – attracting international headliners, diversifying audiences and amplifying progressive voices while safeguarding the festival's uniquely British free spirit. "It's about losing yourself in an alternative world for five days," Eavis says.

Stormzy, Adele, The Rolling Stones, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Ye – Eavis booked them all. But it's not just a case of if you build it, they will come. "You have to convince massive artists because they can just play to their own stadiums," she says from Worthy Farm before this year's festival. "Our tickets sell out before people know who's playing. So, the acts are playing to a completely new crowd." Eavis personally wrote to Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney and Dolly Parton to convince them to play, setting out the case for performing at Glastonbury. "We do environmental campaigning, we do political, we do everything," says Eavis. "All kinds of alternative ways of life are championed, [which is why] it sits apart."

Booking Jay-Z in 2008 was Eavis's most pivotal moment to date – a hip-hop headliner in a traditional rock space. Noel Gallagher was incensed ("It's wrong"), the billing became a national talking point, then the New Yorker blew everyone away. "I booked Jay-Z because I thought he would knock it out of the park, because he's an incredible performer and one of the world's greatest hip-hop artists," says Eavis. "It changed the perception of a Glastonbury headliner. Anyone can headline anywhere now; there are no boundaries. It's totally normal to see Stormzy headlining, but at that time, it was very much white guitar music."

Jay-Z put Glastonbury on the map for US artists (Eavis credits being able to attract Neil Young, Springsteen and Beyoncé to it). These days, the line-up is split evenly on gender lines too. "It was an obvious change that needed to happen," she says. Under Eavis's stewardship, the festival has handed over space to

diverse creative forces. In 2007, the Park, dedicated to global musical voices, and Block9, a response to the lack of gay spaces at UK festivals, opened. The Park launched with musical collective Africa Express doing a mammoth seven-hour set, and the queer club energy of Block9's sprawling installation brought a whole new vibe with it. "It changed the audience and opened the festival up," says Eavis. "You're in a field in a valley in Somerset but you're basically at the best club in the world in Brooklyn. You are transported completely." Glastonbury has introduced new safe spaces too, for women and anyone experiencing harassment or having a difficult time at the festival.

Glastonbury has always championed sustainable living but recent ideas like 2019's plastic bottle ban were not easy to implement: the festival infrastructure had to be altered, festival goers convinced, drinks companies kept on board. "We met a lot of resistance from the drinks companies because they wanted to sell their PET bottles of Coke and Fanta," says Eavis. While the ban was a success (Eavis estimates they reduced plastic waste by 1.6 million bottles), the goal was bigger. "It's an example of the ban working. Glastonbury is a [temporary] city the size of Oxford. If we can do it, there's no reason why Oxford can't do it and then London." Next up: crisps. "I'm obsessed with finding a compostable crisp packet," she smiles.

The plastic bottle commitment convinced Sir David Attenborough to attend in 2019, one of several memorable departures from the usual programming. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn quoted the 19th-century poet Shelley on stage in 2017; Pussy Riot called for revolution in 2015, the same year the Dalai Lama celebrated his 80th birthday on the Pyramid stage with Patti Smith and a birthday cake. "I love going the extra mile and doing stuff that you wouldn't expect," says Eavis. "There is nothing like stepping onto the site to get a real sense of what it's about. You can watch it on TV, but nothing prepares you for stepping into this other world. I love bringing people into that and going, 'Look! Because it's another way of living.'"

—COLIN CRUMMY

Emily Eavis



Michael Ward

How the young British actor is manifesting greatness in every drama he stars in.

MICHAEL WARD WAS working as a model in London when he learned an early lesson in manifestation. "I remember going to my agency, and they asked me the type of thing I would like to be in," he recalls. "I was like, well, maybe something like *Top Boy* one day. I was such a big fan."

Cut to 2019, and Ward was cast as the lead in series three of the Netflix reboot of the Channel 4 drama. Bonus points, which Ward couldn't have manifested in his wildest dreams, none other than Drake was heading up the revival.

But then it wasn't all down to wishful thinking. Ashley Walters, who plays Summerhouse estate kingpin Dushane Hill, was Ward's inspiration from the C4 show. Fifteen-year-old Ward wasted no time in messaging the actor on Instagram asking to audition. "I feel like when you come from this world, there's not much stuff that gets made in it, whether it has violence in there, whether it's love or whatever," says Ward of his fandom. "There's not much to represent, so [*Top Boy*] was something that we latched on to."

And represent *Top Boy* does; a bona fide cult classic, the series tells new stories about the fragile, sometimes cyclical nature of life spent on estates like Summerhouse, through a mix of social realism, humour and humanity. It has changed the UK's drama landscape for the better, bringing together an almost all-Black, all-British cast to create prestige television.

In fact, prestige British dramas appear to be Ward's calling. He starred in Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* anthology in *Lovers Rock*, one of President Barack Obama's favourite films of 2020, and won the 2019 BAFTA Rising Star Award for his role in 2019's musical crime drama *Blue Story*: following in the footsteps of Tom Hardy, John Boyega and Daniel Kaluuya.

Next up, Ward has a role in the Netflix football project *The Beautiful Game*, alongside Bill Nighy, and is now filming the Sam Mendes-helmed period drama *Empire of Light*, alongside Olivia Colman, Colin Firth and Toby Jones. Beyond that, Ward plans to manifest stories that matter to him.

"If I don't become a creator, then the stuff I want to watch might not get made," he says. "No one has my brain, no one might want to tell the stories that I want to tell. And really, sharing your passion... well, that's what this is all about." —DAVID TAYLOR



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK, NETFLIX

The Tinder Swindler was a zeitgeist-altering documentary on modern dating – exactly as its director intended.

FELICITY MORRIS, PRODUCER of the Netflix documentary *Don't F**k With Cats*, first approached dating con artist Simon Leviev when he was in prison on fraud charges. She wanted to make a film about his more recent exploits: using dating apps to extract huge sums of money from vulnerable women. "He knew what the angle was, he knew I was a female filmmaker," Morris says. "The day he got out, he called me, like – let's do this, but I want to be paid." But, Leviev (born Shimon Hayut) had a lesson to learn: don't f**k with Felicity Morris.

"I think he probably underestimated me," Morris says, stating that cash was never on the table during the making of *The Tinder Swindler*, which is the most watched documentary ever on Netflix. "The [viewing figures] were mind-blowing," Morris says. "Thousands of people tell yarns about their age, or maybe what they do for a living, or their past – but in terms of being a mastermind con artist, I think they're few and far between. Which is obviously why the story was so good."

The Tinder Swindler is a wild ride. Over a number of years, Leviev convinced women he met on the app that he was a wealthy jetsetter, son of the 'Diamond King' Lev Leviev – lavishing his partners with expensive gifts and arranging surprise rendezvous at five-star hotels. But then, after months of idyllic romance, his tall tales would take a breakeck turn: he would claim to be pursued by nebulous "enemies", evidenced by pictures of his bloodied entourage. Next, unexplained security issues hindered the use of his bank cards. Leviev needed thousands of dollars just to tide him over, he'd say. They'd obviously get it back, he assured them, while using the women's money to fund his next date. One woman, Ayleen Charlotte, told Morris that she gave Leviev £110,000. At the height of his manipulations, the con artist swindled hundreds of thousands of dollars out of several women.

Leviev denies all the allegations. But Morris wanted to centre the women in her story, not him, and understood that it would take

a woman at the helm to get to the heart of it. "We felt it should be a female filmmaker, and I was interviewing women to direct it," she recalls. "And then I just said to my bosses, maybe I can do this, you know? And they said, 'Why not?'" After Morris and producer Bernie Higgins laid the groundwork, mapping out the narrative from digging through hundreds of WhatsApp messages, she sat down for 10-hour shoots with victims like Cecilie Fjellhøy. Morris recognises just how much of an ask that was. "She had to relive the love story in order for you to believe that she loved him, but obviously, by the point of the interview, she hated him, she had no feelings," she says. "So to relive all that... she was just amazing, really."

But an early screening proved uncomfortable viewing. As Fjellhøy got further and further into debt, a woman in the audience started laughing at her, but for Morris it was no laughing matter. "We wanted to change people's opinions about emotional cons. We wanted people to get to understand what men and women go through when they're defrauded in this way."

The documentary has raised awareness of online scammers, but perhaps the film's greater achievement lies in the way it helps us understand the victims. When Morris first heard the story, she wondered how anyone could fall for the con. "And then, as soon as I met them, I realised they're a lot like me; they're just young, professional women trying to make it in life and love. Our job was to make sure that they were taken seriously." —JACK KING

Three of the women who spoke out: Cecilie Fjellhøy, Ayleen Charlotte and Pernilla Sjöholm.

Convicted fraudster Simon Leviev.



DJ, therapist and the driver of music's most compelling conversations.

WHEN NEW ZEALAND-BORN Zane Lowe was growing up, his heroes felt as far away as Mars. "The idea of anybody touring there was slim to none," says the host of Apple Music's flagship shows. "The *NME* was six weeks late because it was shipped over by boat." Now, as Apple's man in LA, he's the guy the biggest musicians on planet Earth get up close and confessional with. Justin Bieber cried, as did Ye; Lady Gaga chose conversation over promotion. The interviews – ambitious and sprawling – run long.

Musicians and audiences alike continue to respond to Lowe's enduring love for the form. Making his name during a 12-year run on Radio 1, he honed a signature style that's part therapist, part aficionado. Somewhere between enthusiasm and emotional honesty, Lowe, 48, hits a sweet spot, generating simmering conversations that compel a global audience. Here's how he remains a hero to musicians and music lovers worldwide.

"I love music. I don't want to complicate that. I don't want to overthink it. I don't want to trade it for something else. I'm not using it as a key to unlock some other ambition. What people ultimately look for from me is conversation about music – a very simple concept. But it's not one that everyone wants to have."

"I have one rule in all of this, which is go where the artist goes. First and foremost, I'm a fan. I was ready to move on from radio and into streaming – I welcomed it. I knew that music was going to become this direct-to-fan experience, and that fans and artists were going to connect directly. I thought I was building this modern version of what I knew, and then I realised that I actually had to let go of everything I knew."

"My job is to keep up as best I can with the artists and fans. Drake might wake up one morning and go, 'I'm putting this out in five minutes.' Am I going to get angry that he didn't give me six weeks' notice? No, that's redundant. What I can do is be ready to go immediately."

"Along the way, I found a connection to music beyond just listening to it. There are times when I've been going through things, and I know the emotion is building up, and I need to release it. I will 100 per cent refer to music to help me do that. I remember talking to Thom Yorke about his song "Dawn Chorus". The first time I heard that song, I got so overwhelmingly emotional, I started really crying in my car. I almost had to pull over. It just unlocked something I was going through and brought it to the surface really quickly. When you have an artist of that calibre finding a way to unlock their feelings, how can it not reach you? How can it not do that for you?"

"I'm gravitationally pulled towards music. Being connected to new music isn't really something I have to tell myself to do. It's muscle memory. I'm constantly amazed by the fact that X number of notes and X number of minutes can inspire people to find things that have never been said before. I love having music recommended to me. It's a gift that I feel I can give and a gift that I love to receive from other people."

"I try to create a dedicated listening experience, because when we do that, we get in touch with ourselves and our surroundings in a deeper way. I have no problem sitting still and putting on a record. The holistic goal for me is to try to keep music within the peripheral vision, so it's not just simmering in the background. Because it is such a pure form of communication, such a generous way to share thoughts and feelings and emotions. I'm always trying to find ways for people to just listen. Stop scrolling and listen." —REBECCA DOLAN





Declan Rice

Leading the line on and off the pitch, the footballer is tipped as a future England captain in the making.

THE PAST 12 MONTHS have seen Declan Rice establish himself as one of the best box-to-box midfielders in the game – a rock in England's route to the Euro 2020 final just as he was in West Ham's thrilling Europa League run this year. His club's player of the season, Rice, 23, is one of the first names on Gareth Southgate's team sheet, and in this World Cup year, he's ready to take his game to a whole new level.

It's been quite a year for you at club and country level... how have you reflected on your achievements?

I'm really proud, but obviously disappointed with the outcome at the Euros and in the Europa League. Lessons were learned and there's definitely more to come from us – at club and international level. I want to keep working hard, keep pushing and maturing and improving – this is just the beginning.

It was a remarkable season for you and West Ham – what did you learn from [captain] Mark Noble?

Absolutely everything. He's known as Mr West Ham for a reason, he is one of the finest players, captains and people I know. He commands the team with such dedication and respect, and brings the best out of players because he's a good person. He will push you and call you out when you need to improve, but he's the first to commend you. So the main thing I've learned from him is to be a good leader – be a good person.

Does that kind of leadership come naturally to you?

Yeah, I'd say so. My dad always taught me to be vocal on the pitch and speak up. I was lucky in the West Ham academy to captain the under 16s, under 18s and under 21s – so I learned and built on my leadership skills. Having 'Nobes' as my captain has really helped me along the way.

Your name is mentioned as a future England captain – how does that make you feel?

To be honest, I don't think about it too much. Every time I play for England, all I'm thinking about is doing what's best for the team and performing as well as I can.

How much is the World Cup on your mind right now?

It's definitely on our minds but there's still a lot to do before we get there. Every young kid who plays football dreams about playing in the World Cup. I was watching the last one as a fan in Dubai. I loved being part of that crowd, the singing, the national anthem – it inspired me to want to play for Gareth Southgate's team.

After Euro 2020 – and looking ahead to the World Cup – there's a lot of dialogue around players realising their potential and impact as role models. Is that important to you?

It's amazing to see this generation of footballers engaging in world events and using their platforms for good. We're being given more and more space to be more than just footballers. I'd love to use the voice I have from football for a good cause. I respect people like Hendo [Jordan Henderson] and Rashy [Marcus Rashford] so much for what they've done – for giving back to the community.

—MIKE CHRISTENSEN



RICHARD RATCLIFFE

The husband of former political prisoner Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is a man of meaningful action.

RICHARD RATCLIFFE'S IS a story of geopolitical machinations. It is a tale of diplomatic catastrophe. It is a story about marriage and family and what a man does to protect both, even when he is seemingly powerless to do so. But above all else, Ratcliffe's story is his wife's.

In 2016, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was visiting her parents in Iran with her 22-month-old daughter, Gabriella, when she was arrested on spying charges. The charity project manager was sentenced to five years in Iranian prison for plotting to overthrow the government, and later sentenced to another year for propaganda against Iran.

All charges were strenuously denied by Zaghari-Ratcliffe, her family and the human rights groups fighting for her release, who believed that she was held hostage over a £400 million debt owed to Iran by the UK. In 2017, Boris Johnson, then foreign secretary, further jeopardised matters by incorrectly stating that Zaghari-Ratcliffe had been training journalists while on holiday in Tehran. While he later retracted the claim, the damage had been done, with Iranian media frequently referencing Johnson's comments. She later described living in the "shadow of his words".

If the future Prime Minister was guilty of careless talk, Richard Ratcliffe was his opposite: a man of meaningful action.

He campaigned for six years for his wife's release, undertaking two hunger strikes – the first outside the Iranian Embassy, arranged to take place concurrently with one by Zaghari-Ratcliffe; the second outside the Foreign Office as pressure on the British Government grew acutely. Ratcliffe's desperate actions kept his wife's case firmly in the global spotlight – as politicians, actors and activists visited his flimsy tent – but the gruelling experience took a toll. On day 21, Ratcliffe ended his second hunger strike, telling supporters on Twitter: "Today I have promised Nazanin to end the hunger strike. Gabriella needs two parents. Thank you all for your overwhelming care these past three weeks."

There were false dawns: rumours of early release; what proved to be empty rhetoric from respective governments on the state of negotiations; a move from prison to house arrest in 2020 that signalled the ordeal might be almost over. Finally, in early 2022, Nazanin was released alongside fellow British-Iranian national Anousheh Ashoori, to be reunited with her husband, now-seven-year-old child, and family in the UK.

It's been "baby steps" since, Ratcliffe has said of having his wife back home and his family reunited. "The happily ever after is a journey not an arrival," he told the *Independent*, "but we will get there with patience and love." —DAVID TAYLOR

Amrapali Gan

How OnlyFans' CEO is putting power (and cash) in the hands of creators.

ONLYFANS, THE SUBSCRIPTION platform that allows creators to charge for photos and videos, has revolutionised porn, challenged stigmas and empowered a new wave of internet commerce. But we hardly need to explain that, do we?

OnlyFans has experienced an astronomical rise in profit and popularity since 2020, drawing shout-outs from Beyoncé on "Savage" and being leveraged by The Weeknd and Cardi B for promo. The actor Bella Thorne pulled down US\$1m on her first day on the platform. Despite being best known for independent porn – many other platforms ban the monetisation of explicit media – OnlyFans has attracted a broad range of creators, including fitness experts and musicians, who charge a monthly fee to access their content.

The site's earning potential has proved a lifeline for many. But with platforms like Patreon and Gumroad also offering direct-to-consumer commerce for content creators, what's led to OnlyFans' exponential growth? It's about giving people agency, says CEO Amrapali Gan: "Creators want control. They want ownership over their content." The subscription site gives them that, plus a healthy slice of the pie if they prove successful: creators keep 80 per cent of what they make on the site, and the company says it pays out over US\$5bn annually to its creators.

British businessman Tim Stokely founded OnlyFans in 2016, but the platform didn't strike gold until the pandemic. Now, it represents more

than a symptom of a precarious tech bubble, says Gan. "It's just the way things are going to be moving forward," she says of the broader transition from free to paid social media. "Ultimately, everyone wants to be able to [work on] something they're passionate about and monetise it."

Gan is in the business of market disruption. She took the reins at OnlyFans in late 2021 after Stokely stepped down. Prior to joining the company, she helped launch Cannabis Cafe, the first of its kind in the US. "I very much have a growth mindset," says Gan. "I really enjoy fast-paced environments in non-traditional industries. The challenge and the change excites me."

When OnlyFans launched, it represented a shift in the creator economy, allowing users to view just about any kind of paywalled content without unpleasanties such as trolls, adverts and feed-skewing algorithms. It also meant liberation from the nipple-shy world. But in 2021, OnlyFans followed Facebook and Instagram by banning sexually explicit content. Critics said the site was abandoning the content (and creators) that launched it into the Big Tech stratosphere, and in many cases, cutting off a source of income for sex workers. Despite pressure from partners and payment providers, OnlyFans reversed its decision within a week.


Gan understands the episode created confusion about brand values. "It's a company where there's a lot of misconceptions around who we are," she says. "I'm proud to represent

a community that is inclusive of adult creators, sex workers and glamour models, alongside lifestyle creators, influencers, artists and athletes."

The CEO understands the power of a platform that embraces sex positivity. One of her favourite accounts belongs to Alexandra Hunt, a former exotic dancer running for Congress in Philadelphia. After an online troll made a joke that they'd be seeing Hunt on OnlyFans when her campaign failed, she responded by joining the platform and using her account to raise funds for the campaign. (On 13 May, Hunt posted that the account had raised £80,000 in just a month.) And OnlyFans is widening its remit; launching a creative fashion fund with designer Rebecca Minkoff, and sponsoring British GT team Enduro.

There remains work to be done about changing wider perceptions of the platform – and adult content creators. Earlier this year, British actor Sarah Jayne Dunn was sacked from *Hollyoaks* over her OnlyFans account. "It's hypocritical," says Gan. "They're mad at her for suddenly having control over her image, when that's what they had control over previously. She's able to monetise her name and likeness, and the show has no say over that."

Under Gan's leadership, there is little tolerance for shaming. "I'm happy to be the most inclusive social media platform," she says. "Our mission has always been to empower creators to own their full potential. We're putting control back into the hands of the creators." —REBECCA DOLAN



Richard Ratcliffe went on two hunger strikes for his wrongly jailed wife, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.



Tom Connaughton

The guy in charge of everything Spotify UK, except his own playlists.

ULTIMATE DISNEY MOVIE SONGS; Disney Classics; Disney Princess. Not, perhaps, the top musical categories you'd expect Spotify's number-one man in the UK to have at his fingertips. But while Tom Connaughton may be in charge of the Swedish tech giant's operations here, he is less in control of his personal listening experiences. "You know what? That is my four-year-old daughter, Lily," he says. "She is heavily impacting the algorithm at the moment."

In any case, Connaughton is arguably too busy to manage his playlists. Promoted to MD of Spotify four months after joining in 2018, he has helped the music industry disruptor chart a path through new adventures in podcasting, playlists and platform rules. But upheaval has been the mood music since Connaughton entered the business in 2001. At that time, peer-to-peer file sharing service Napster was the disruptive force, then involved in a lengthy legal battle with the big five record labels.

Two decades later, Spotify is the headliner in the digital music revolution, with a record 182 million subscribers globally. Just see what happens when service drops, as it did briefly in February. "My phone started blowing up with friends asking, 'What's going on?'" says Connaughton. "I was at the gym and everybody had put their weights down, stopped pedalling, and they were looking at their phones in absolute horror because Spotify had stopped working."

A two-part strategy has helped Spotify become an essential component of our lives. A carefully stratified

ecosystem of playlists that all ladder up from genre niches to the chart-toppers-only vibe of Hot Hits UK and its 2.8 million subscribers ensures a personalised experience, while a more recent push into podcasting that's seen Joe Rogan, Meghan Markle and Ian Wright sign up to the platform has kept subscriptions coming.

But it's not all been smooth listening. In January, Rogan's anti-vaccine flirtations led Neil Young and Joni Mitchell to pull their music from the service. In response, the company published its 'Platform Rules' that will govern future community management, with chief executive Daniel Ek recognising the service's obligation "to do more to provide balance and access to widely accepted information from the medical and scientific communities". "That's something we hadn't done before but should have," says Connaughton.

Spotify, recognising its power in the space, is using that to elevate new talent and create new kinds of listening experiences. Indie rockers Wet Leg's debut album charted at No. 1 in the UK after a boost from Spotify's Radar programme. If you want an idea of where the focus is right now, you'll find it in Connaughton's favourite podcast of the year so far: *Looking for Esther* from 61-year-old cancer survivor Esther Robertson, a beneficiary of the company's Sound Up scheme for underrepresented creators. "You'd need a heart of stone not to be moved by it," he says. "I was fortunate to be listening to the final episode when I was in the shower so I could cry my eyes out." —ROB LEEDHAM

PHOTOGRAPHS, GETTY.

BIANCA SAUNDERS

We've fallen for this young British menswear designer's craft. Let us count the ways...

KNOWN FOR HER OFF-KILTER approach to bold tailoring, the 28-year-old British designer is beloved by everyone from Naomi Campbell to the CEO of Balenciaga. But don't just take their word for her brilliance – here's our four cents, too.

Those in the know, know

After founding her brand four years ago, Saunders has been namechecked by Ye on Twitter, had Campbell co-host a dinner for her at Paris Fashion Week, and been mentored by Balenciaga's Cédric Charbit. Suffice to say, she has tasteful friends in high places, which only bodes well for the quality of her output.

Tailoring ripe for Gen Z

Though many people may be bleating about the death of the suit, Saunders has been quietly reimagining the form, producing syrupy two-pieces in modern fabrics, broad-shouldered silhouettes and bright shades. In doing so, she's reinvented the idea of the suit from a boring workaday staple into an ultra-chic high-fashion essential. Case in point: the chartreuse leather suit which slipped down her Paris runway back in January.

British colour has a new master

Sir Paul Smith – longtime ruler of the off-key British fashion roost with his mastery of colour – has now passed the baton to Saunders. Where her regular use of shades such as cobalt and scarlet could feel clownish, her trained colourist's eye ensures that the looks always read as grown up as they do fresh.

A silhouette of her own

For her AW/21 collection, Saunders matched skintight scuba fabric rollnecks in magic-eye prints with wide-leg cargo trousers. Roomy denim suits had killer appeal, and body-con jersey two-piece tracksuits were teamed with chunky square-toed boots. The resulting silhouettes were unexpected but instantly recognisable as Saunders's own. Armani has the strong-yet-flowy suit, Jean Paul Gaultier has his corsets, and for signature Bianca Saunders, it's all about the new breed of masculine body-con – and we'll be wearing it for a while yet.

—TEO VAN DEN BROEKE





AZEEM RAFIQ



The whistleblower who changed the game for English cricket.

"BEING A BYSTANDER makes you part of the problem. There's no hiding away from that. They hurt more than the perpetrators – that's the harsh reality."

It's midday on a Friday in May and Azeem Rafiq has just put in his go-to Nando's order. We are in Leicester, where the humidity and overcast conditions are a match for how the 31-year-old former Yorkshire cricketer is feeling.

"The simple answer is, I'm not all right. I feel shattered. I feel exhausted. I feel like I'm having to navigate way more than I should have to navigate," says Rafiq. "And because of how big it's become, I'm not just navigating cricket now. I'm navigating politicians. I'm navigating a scale that is way, way too much for one human being."

It's been 18 months since Rafiq, who is Pakistani English, shared his experience of 'institutional racism' at Yorkshire, that left him close to taking his own life; since then the whistleblower's testimony has exposed a toxic and racist culture at the heart of English cricket. A long-delayed report by Yorkshire found Rafiq was the victim of racial harassment and bullying at the club, but denied institutional racism. The scandal has reverberated on a county and national level since; the day before our meeting in Leicester, Essex county cricket was hit with a £50,000 fine after an investigation into racist language at the club.

"It puts me under a lot of pressure and stress, but things are moving in the right direction," says Rafiq. "In the short term, accountability is a focal part of that. As a club, the things that have gone on at Essex have not been good enough and the accountability is going to send a message out to everyone else that there is zero tolerance now. So I see it as a positive thing, moving forward."

Rafiq says he had little desire for things to be like this, but given the way Yorkshire county cricket club dismissed his claims of racial abuse – only later did both chairman and chief executive resign – he felt he was left with no choice. "In an ideal world, we wouldn't have had the car crash that we did, but if we hadn't then we'd be here for another 10 years still talking about this case."

While he's received support from people outside cricket, he says he's received no backing from the sport he loves. "That hurts me," he says. Instead, he has become a target. Days after Rafiq gave evidence before MPs, the *Times* published anti-semitic Facebook messages sent by him in 2011. "When my stuff came up, I said to my team, 'This is going to be horrible, but it doesn't matter because I deserve whatever comes my way. I've made a mistake. I've hurt people.'"

Rafiq did what Yorkshire didn't: he apologised unreservedly. "If you make a mistake, you've got to be held accountable. But really this is not about me," he says now. "For the bigger cause, it's actually great because it brings another minority group into the debate. And I'm proving my own point: because I'm talking about institutional cultures, and systemic, environmental-based racism. And the fact there's such a norm in the UK that at the time [of his messages], no one did anything. I didn't get sanctioned, so that tells you that no one thought there was anything wrong with it."

In a show of support, leaders in the Jewish community immediately reached out to Rafiq and offered to help better educate him about their faith and culture. "I feel embarrassed to say this but I didn't know anything about the Holocaust until after I met a survivor in London," he says, with remorse. "I got to know the Jewish community, the love, the appreciation, the way they've educated me – it was beautiful. That's what humanity is – it really doesn't need to be any more complicated than that."

While the public ordeal has taken its toll on Rafiq and his family, he's proud of himself. "I know my own feelings, so I'm not naive. The attacks have come and will continue to come. I know I put my head above the parapet to be nailed, but it was never about me. Where I end up, where my career ends up, I actually don't care. The most important thing is that for everything I put myself and my family through, down the line, things actually change. If it does that, I will look back with immense pride – because I know how difficult it has been." —MIKE CHRISTENSEN



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
Klarna.

ADAM LEVENE

Bringing a human touch to online shopping.

"WHY CAN'T I just text the store instead?"

In 2015, after one too many times left on hold on the phone by a local store, Adam Levene founded a virtual shopping platform. He named it Hero. The platform has gone on to become a saviour to online shoppers craving, you know, actual human contact. As a result, Hero has become an industry leader in live virtual shopping, connecting online shoppers directly to businesses and sellers. It is now used in over 30 global markets by companies including Nike, Levi's and LVMH.

What does it mean in practice? Hero's virtual personal shopping experience has been likened to FaceTiming your favourite sales associate: ready-made for an ever-growing audience that wants a more personal touch. Its success caught the attention of Klarna, the global retail bank, payments and shopping giant, which bought Hero in 2021.

It's a partnership that just makes sense. The Swedish company is Europe's most valuable fintech unicorn: available to 90 million active consumers across more than 250,000 retail partners.

Levene is now Klarna's head of social commerce, and sees the partnership as a huge step in humanising online shopping: "[Klarna's founders] have built an iconic brand and proposition, and a unique culture that makes it the perfect home for our team. By joining forces, we are able to bring our technology to even more merchants and consumers across the world, making online shopping more social, interactive and ultimately more human."

—DAVID TAYLOR

AT JUST 20, Jack Draper is making the most of being a wildcard. Last year at the Queen's Club Championship, he defeated Jannik Sinner, the world number 23. Then, again as a wildcard, he claimed the first set off defending champion Novak Djokovic in the first round at Wimbledon. Draper would go on to lose the next three sets, but clearly winning is on the cards for the young star who burst onto the tennis scene when he won the Play Your Way to Wimbledon competition.

Draper's tennis career was always a good bet. Dad Roger is the former chief executive of Sport England, while mum Nicky is a former junior tennis champion. And while there have been setbacks from injury, these have helped him find his feet. "Being injured a bit more at a younger age has helped me become more mature in a way because when you're playing tennis, you're in this bubble. When you're injured, you can reflect. I'm all the better for it as this is the most confident in my playing and my body I've ever been," he says. Draper sat down to talk about the future of the game.

British tennis is about to up its game

"Tennis in this country has never had a problem with finding good players. It's more about creating an environment and a culture where it's very high-performance based, instead of being a bit mediocre. So the future is very exciting. We've got Emma [Raducanu], myself and loads of young players coming through so it's going to be interesting to see that evolve and see

where British tennis is really going."

The grassroots is where it's at

"When I played tennis at school, I won Play Your Way to Wimbledon and it's a great competition because it really gets the next generation going. Any big support in tennis is just going to get more people playing – whatever age or background – and being inspired. That's where we're going to see more participation, more younger players coming through, and a better culture around tennis in the UK."

Rafa Nadal: hair idol, tough act to follow

"When they're younger, everyone tries to reenact or copy the players they love. I like watching the way Rafa [Nadal] holds himself and the way he acts, especially in tough moments. But then you realise, well, I can't grow my hair like him, I can't do that like him, so I'm better off just being me. He's shown me that no matter what's going on in your life, on the court, off the court, you have just got to keep working hard, doing the right things and keep believing that you're on the path to success."

The wheelchair pros are showing how the game should be played

"Honestly, the enormity of what the likes of Alfie Hewett and Gordon Reid do is unbelievable. It hasn't gained enough traction yet, but grand slams

like Wimbledon and the Australian Open really give them an audience to show what they're capable of. Tennis is a sport for anyone from any background or disability; it's a sport for everyone."

The future of tennis will be streamed

"Streaming will bring a different audience to tennis, like it did with Formula 1. [Until recently], I'd never watched F1 but all of a sudden I was getting into it, watching the races. That could be the same in tennis, as it's important for people outside of tennis to see how much excitement there is and how you've got different personalities; to go behind the scenes and see all the things high-level athletes have to go through." —MIKE CHRISTENSEN

A black and white portrait of Marie-Claire Daveu, a woman with dark hair pulled back, smiling. She is wearing a dark, patterned top. The background is a solid blue color.

Marie-Claire Daveu

The changemaker leading a French luxury powerhouse towards a more sustainable future.

MARIE-CLAIRE DAVEU is on a mission. "I want to change the global paradigm," she says. "We won't be able to do it alone and that's why we work with a collective approach." But first, Daveu is leading by example, as the chief sustainability and institutional affairs officer at Kering: owners of Balenciaga, Gucci and Alexander McQueen. "The luxury industry and sustainability must go hand in hand," she says. "We established a clear governance where sustainability is at the forefront of everything we do."

Daveu – who served as chief of staff to French politician Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet before she was hired by François-Henri Pinault in 2012 to tackle the luxury conglomerate's environmental impact – has had a major effect on the way in which the company operates. In 2012, Kering introduced its first EP&L (Environmental Profit & Loss) act, which measures carbon emissions, water consumption, air and water pollution, and waste production across the company's entire supply chain, making the environmental impact of the business visible and quantifiable. "With the EP&L, we have been able to implement change across the company," says Daveu. "We have taken into account our raw materials, from the cotton we use to where our leather is sourced, and what happens to a product at the end of its life."

One of Daveu's early goals was to tackle surplus product waste with recycling and upcycling projects, but she is increasingly future focussed. Kering recently participated in a \$46 million funding round for San Francisco-based VitroLabs' lab-grown leather. Elsewhere, it launched a Materials Innovation Lab, where 4,000 sustainable fabrics and textiles are being developed.

For Daveu, the sustainability strategy at Kering is just the beginning. With the support of French president Emmanuel Macron, Kering introduced the Fashion Pact in 2019, which now comprises more than 1,250 brands across the fashion and textile industry. The company has also worked with Cartier to establish the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030, setting clear and ambitious sustainability targets. "We have a responsibility to lead by example," says Daveu. "Sustainability is now in the DNA of luxury companies, and this trickles down to all businesses. If we don't do it, why would anyone else?" —ZAK MAQUI

A black and white action shot of tennis player Jack Draper. He is wearing a white tennis shirt, a dark cap, and a wristband, captured in a dynamic pose as if hitting a backhand shot. The background is a solid blue color.

Jack Draper

The young wildcard on course to be the next British tennis ace.

ADWOA ABOAH IS RECALIBRATING the way she looks at life. "I think I'm going to really love my thirties," says the actor and founder of nonprofit organisation Gurls Talk, who turned the big 3-0 in May. "I'm looking forward to the self-confidence. There's definitely a new air to a lot of my female friends that have turned 30 – they stand taller."

The idea of Aboah standing taller still is quite a prospect. She first found her feet in the fashion world, rapidly ascending into one of the world's most in-demand models, with the star quality that saw her named BFC Model of the Year in 2017. But behind the scenes, Aboah struggled with addiction issues and depression (she has been sober since she was 22). In 2015, after spells in rehab and an attempt to take her own life, she took time out from the industry to recover, connect with nonprofit organisations and eventually, establish her own: Gurls Talk. Since then, through Aboah's signature blend of radical honesty and openness to others, her stature has grown in new ways.

Aboah set up Gurls Talk with Daniella Raveh in 2017 to create a space for young women to explore issues like mental health, anxiety, loneliness or sexuality. "I've always wanted Gurls Talk to be a comfort blanket that follows you from one stage of your life to the next," she says. "It can't stop life from 'lifeing' but it can act as a gatekeeper to the never-ending noise."

A combination of live events and online community, Gurls Talk has facilitated conversations about rape culture, sobriety and the power of sisterhood with guests including Booker winner Bernardine Evaristo and fellow multi-hyphenate Emily Ratajkowski. The Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 deepened the conversation and the stories they share.

"The many transitions we have to make in life – school, university, menopause – are what we want to be speaking about at Gurls Talk," says Aboah. "It's so humbling to be part of the community. There are always ways of looking at life from different perspectives."

This year, Aboah made a fresh start of her own, starring in the Netflix reboot of Channel 4's *Top Boy*, in which she plays a middle-class girl in a working-class world after falling for a gang member. Though acting is newish on her CV (she also had

a role in 2019's *Ghost in the Shell*), it has been on the agenda since she graduated in modern drama from Brunel University in 2013. *Top Boy* aligned with Aboah's thinking on the stories she wants to tell. "The show resonates so much with people because the storytelling is so raw, it's so authentic and it highlights things that either we don't understand or we're unwilling to talk about," she says. "It does a great job at pushing certain topics to the forefront and showing you that these things do happen, even if you're so far removed from them, and it does it in a very unglamorised way, which is great."

Aboah recognises the value in sharing stories in all their unvarnished glory. "That's not to say we all need to do it right this second," she clarifies. "It's something you need to come to in your own time, because it's a big deal letting a community and people in. But when you hear someone who shares a story that resonates with you, who maybe looks like you, who comes from the same ethnic or financial background as you, who is in a position doing music or football or something that you'd like to do one day, it just makes you feel less alone."

Aboah knows this because she has been there. "Those stories of hope really, really matter because when you're in the deep depths of depression, it's grey and dark and you feel like you're never going to get out of it." Now, Aboah is happy to share her story, in the hope it will help others share theirs. Despite the challenges, she says, it has been worth it to get here.

"All my best moments in life have come later on," she says. "The good sex, the love, the amazing friendships, the good dancing, the experiences, the relationship I have with my parents, the career, the discomfort, coming through the discomfort – all those experiences have come later. I had to really fight to get there, but it was completely worth it."

—MIKE CHRISTENSEN

The Gurls Talk founder continues to open up the conversation.

ADWOA ABOAH





The A-List has fallen for the Valentino designer's heroically romantic style vision.

Pierpaolo Piccioli

Pierpaolo Piccioli is a byword for elegance. Famed in fashion circles for toeing the line between commercial viability and superlative creative flair, the designer – who has been at the helm of Valentino since 2008 – is as adept at couture ballgowns as he is impeccably tailored suits. His vision of menswear is a kind of new masculinity: fluid and romantic. It's starred on innumerable red carpets and loaded up fans on the way.

1 Sebastian Stan

For his AW/22 show in Paris, Piccioli presented a collection entirely saturated in one specific shade of hot magenta. Each and every garment, from the blooming taffeta gowns to the sneakers was drenched in it. Sebastian Stan, Hollywood's newest action hero, wore a look cut exclusively from the colour for the 2022 Met Gala. "There's a tremendous sense of trust and confidence that comes with wearing a look when you believe the designer and feel drawn to his vision," he says. "To me, there's a freedom and a sophistication to Piccioli's work that comes across effortlessly. It's bold, vibrant and speaks for itself. I love it."

2 Paul Mescal

Ever since Valentino Garavani founded his design house in 1960, Valentino has been synonymous with a specific brand of romance – a scarlet-hued timelessness of its own. It was this understated aesthetic that *Normal People*'s Paul Mescal channelled at the 2022 Met Gala, in an all-black custom look. "I've long thought that the way Valentino dresses men is so elegant," says Mescal. "My Valentino tuxedo was made specially for me by Pierpaolo Piccioli."

3 Paapa Essiedu

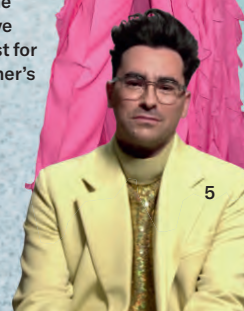
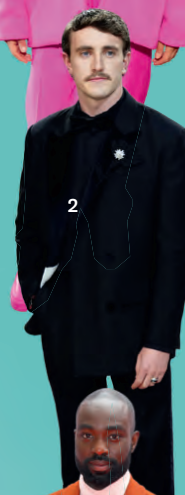
Classic two-piece suits sit at the heart of every Piccioli menswear collection. Less simple black 'work suits' and more sequin-covered or painstakingly hand-crafted black poplin rose patterns, the Valentino suit is something fresh and newly recalibrated. "So much thought and consideration went into making this suit," says actor Paapa Essiedu, who wore this rust-hued Valentino number to the BAFTAs. "It's beautiful, it's fun, and I love it. Having something custom-made brings such privilege."

4 Billy Porter

If there's one thing Piccioli knows how to do, it's create drama with draped fabric. Thankfully, his couturiers' sensibility isn't solely confined to his womenswear work, as demonstrated by longtime fan and hero in his own right, *Pose* star Billy Porter, who wore this hot magenta blouse-trouser-and-cape situation to the Grammys.

5 Dan Levy

Schitt's Creek's Dan Levy likes to push style boundaries. Check this Piccioli-designed Valentino chartreuse sequined number he wore to the Golden Globes. It was a move that proved sequin rollnecks aren't just for Christmas (or, indeed, your grandmother's wardrobe). —TEO VAN DEN BROEKE



GQ HEROES

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



REMEMBER BIMINI'S 'Release the beast' verse on "UK, hun?" Their turn in the season two song from *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* was a bonafide TV event, thanks to lyrics ("gender-bender, cis-tem offender/I like it rough but my lentils tender"), delivery (part Prodigy, part Oliver-Twist-Nancy) and dancing (doing full splits while side-planking on a chair). That combination won them a Must-See Moment nomination at this year's Baftas.

But as writer Jeremy Atherton Lin pointed out when speaking to the 29-year-old *Drag Race* star for *GQ Style*, their high point actually came much earlier in the series. When Bimini spoke to a fellow contestant about their gender, saying, "We're like square pegs in a circle and how we identify isn't up to anyone else," Atherton Lin observed that it was "as if overnight, nonbinary gender entered the national conversation." Bimini acknowledges "that was a moment. I got tons of messages from people from all age groups telling me that because it's such a simple explanation: 'Oh, I get it.'"

That exchange propelled nonbinary people into the wider consciousness and helped secure Bimini a Penguin book deal straight off the back of the show. *Release the Beast: A Drag Queen's Guide to Life* became a *Sunday Times* bestseller, with funny and moving stories grounded in the mantras of self-love and authentic living.

Since then, Bimini has gone on to be a thrilling mix of legitimately edgy, accepted high-fashion and straight-talking person next door. As London nightlife legend Princess Julia noted, Bimini has the same magic that Boy George had back in the 1980s, "appealing to housewives, girls, children, grownups and freaks."

Even if their looks were challenging and *outré*, they prided themselves on still being the kind of people you could sit down with for a cup of tea.

In fact, Boy George watched from the front row as Bimini made their London Fashion Week debut for Richard Quinn. Next to George was Kate Moss, and next to Moss was *Vogue* editor Edward Enninful, who went on to feature them in the pages of his magazine.

Since then, the moments have come thick and fast. Bimini – the first nonbinary talent to be signed to the women's division at Next Models – released the rowdy pop song "God Save this Queen", worked with London mayor Sadiq Khan to campaign to get the capital back on its feet after lockdowns, and promoted better awareness of HIV prevention. The summer schedule includes festival performances, various Prides and working on new music.

Now Bimini is exploring what life might be like for them in a "post-drag era". By this, they don't mean giving up the wigs, makeup and sky-high heels; rather that all of these things are holistically part of who Bimini is – not something they see as a costume to pull on for a show. It's an intriguing prospect that takes Bimini far beyond that breakout, on the road to ensuring theirs is a moment that lasts.

—STUART BRUMFITT

The death-dropping breakout star of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*.

BIMINI

PHOTOGRAPH: MARCIN KEMPSKI. STYLED BY OLIVER VOLOQUA DSENY



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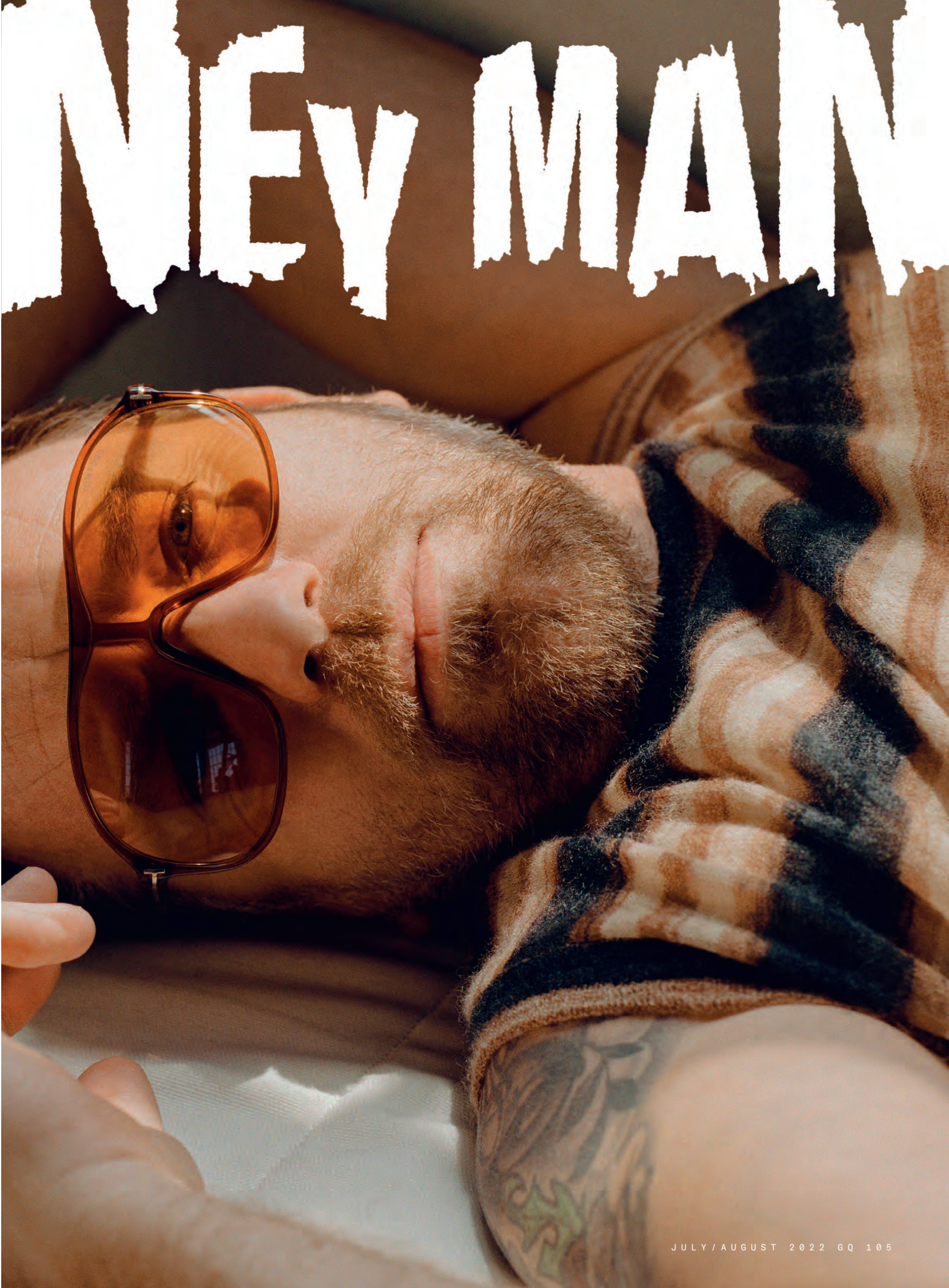




POWER

**FRESH OFF HIS FIRST EMMY,
AND FINALLY BACK HELMING
THE GALAXY'S BIGGEST SCI-FI
FRANCHISE, EWAN MCGREGOR IS
EMBRACING LIFE'S SECOND ACT.**

BY ROSECRANS BALDWIN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN PFLUGER
STYLING BY MICHAEL DARLINGTON



VIEW MAN

IT'S NOT EASY TO HANG OUT WITH EWAN MCGREGOR

The plan at first was to spend an afternoon together in Los Angeles. His publicists finally were able to find me a window, and then: McGregor eloped. Vanished for two weeks. When he showed up again, he needed to appear on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* We finally speak, the morning after the show, and it's all coughs between smiles – the whole household has COVID. “It’s a fucking nightmare,” McGregor says, over Zoom, apologising for his absenteeism. All of this had followed an aggressive stomach bug, before that, a bad cold. And then there was the wedding, which wasn’t really an elopement as much as a ceremony so private, so unannounced, even his publicity team had been caught unaware.

If McGregor’s schedule is in disarray, it’s because he is – not for the first time – in the middle of a moment. In September he won his first Emmy, for his starring role in the Netflix miniseries *Halston*. Prior to that, he was nominated for *Fargo*.

Lately, he’s been making head-turning appearances in small films (*The Birthday Cake*) and giant ones (*Harley Quinn: Birds of Prey*). He completed *Long Way Up* in 2020, a third motorcycle adventure series with his friend Charley Boorman, this time driving electric Harley-Davidsons from the southern tip of Argentina to Los Angeles. McGregor, now 51, has a new baby at home – he and his new wife, the actor Mary Elizabeth Winstead, had a son in June last year. “With COVID, you want to go to bed, but we’ve had to keep going because we have the baby,” he says, laughing under his breath. “It’s just nasty.” And then there’s *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, which has reunited McGregor with his most famous role, and the frothing fanbase of the *Star Wars* universe.

It’s been 17 years since McGregor and George Lucas made the prequels – 1999’s *The Phantom Menace*, 2002’s *Attack of the Clones*, 2005’s *Revenge of the Sith*. If what you remember about them are the bad reviews, worse dialogue, and endless Jar Jar Binks jokes, all I can say is: why, hello there. Over time and across the internet the prequels have been reassessed and – at least among *Star Wars* fans – become beloved, canon, the source of fan art, animated series, and endless memes. A lot of fans, especially young ones, consider McGregor’s films superior to the more recent sequels (*The Force Awakens*, *The Last Jedi*, and 2019’s *The Rise of Skywalker*), which were plagued by director changes and incoherence. The volte-face even changed how McGregor thinks about the films. “The [prequels] weren’t well received,” he says. “What you hear is usually critic-driven, and everyone was very negative. As it transpires, we were creating the relationship I had with *Star Wars* when I was a kid with this [younger] generation.”

“I didn’t know,” he adds, “but now I do.”

WHEN MCGREGOR WAS SIX, he and his brother were taken to see *Star Wars* at the cinema because their uncle, Denis Lawson, was playing the rebel pilot Wedge Antilles. “We couldn’t believe it was in our cinema,” he says. “On top of that, it was *Star Wars*. It must have just blown my tiny mind.” McGregor was born in Perth to a pair of teachers. He moved to London when he was 18 to study drama and got the starring role, four years later, in Channel 4’s *Lipstick On Your Collar*. Then, in 1996, came *Trainspotting*. Some people said his performance as Renton was “dry perfection” (*The New York Times*). Some said he was “the weasled remains of

a contemporary Alfie” (*The Guardian*). Either way, it seemed like Hollywood had found its new leading man.

Has anyone seen everything McGregor? I tried for a month – I might be the first American to watch *Blue Juice* – but came up short. He’s performed in nearly 100 films and episodes of television. I saw him first when *Shallow Grave* played in my college town’s local cinema. I saw *Trainspotting* on a trip to London in 1996. At that point, he was still assuredly Scottish to the audience, but there have been endless roles since with little or no connection to his background – enough to make him seem vaguely international on-screen, unrecognisable from Renton, even rootless. (McGregor became a US citizen in 2016.)

Any back catalogue so big has high and low points. Mainly he’s the lead, occasionally the support. Sometimes he’s excellent and so is the film: *Trainspotting* and *Moulin Rouge!*, gems like the *Beginners* and *Last Days in the Desert*. One constant is a kind of boyish cheerfulness, a good-humoured faithfulness, whether he’s an object of affection (*I Love You Phillip Morris*) or an asshole (*Down With Love*). He can be a terrific villain (*Jane Got A Gun*, *Son Of A Gun*), and not just in films with the word “gun” in the title (*Birds of Prey*, *Haywire*). Sometimes the film is a clunker (*Zoe*), or just absurd (*A Million Ways To Die in the West*), or so stacked with talent (*August: Osage County*), it’s hard to make an impression. A look through McGregor’s career is a study in what it takes to lift screen acting from passable to great.

“If I’ve ever done anything that didn’t come from a burning need to do that play, that part in that film, then it’s never been my best work,” McGregor says. “Not because I didn’t try



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harder, or try hard enough. There's something magical about that: the need to do something. When you read something and you go, 'this has to be me.'"

The film critic David Thomson has a new book coming out next year called *Acting Naturally*. He cites McGregor's voice as one of his top assets as a performer – how, in many roles, it enables him to reinvent himself in a way that breaks free of the British idea, according to Thomson, that your voice identifies you, restrains you. "He would've done very well in the '30s and the '40s," Thomson says. "He has a faith in a sort of valiant forthrightness. There's a lot of optimism in his screen persona. He seems to be having fun in a way a lot of actors don't seem to these days."

"I never find the acting of anything hard," McGregor says. "I have just been doing it a long time, and I trust myself. Before I was even doing it, I was sort of arrogantly self-assured. I'm not like that about lots of things in my life." He pauses and clutches the back of his neck. "That said, if you were to speak to Mary, two weeks before I started *Halston*, I was shitting bricks. There's something about approaching a role – you feel like you've got to do it all. So I am both of those things: I'm a nervous wreck, and I'm absolutely self-assured. But I forget before I start filming that I'm self-assured."

McGregor likes to turn things over. He'll say a thing one way, reconsider, try something else. Adjust himself on the sofa, stroke his beard. It's both self-assured and reassuring. Call it likeability: the kind of charisma that makes a leading man. In my month of watching him, I started to notice how often McGregor's characters are nearly killed in a number of his films. He looks to be hit by a car at the end of *The Ghost Writer*. At the end of *Haywire*, by Steven Soderbergh, he's left to drown. His character is killed by his brother in *Cassandra's Dream*, but the gore is left up to the imagination. As if McGregor is too charming to murder in front of a big crowd.

I mentioned to Thomson that I was trying to guess where McGregor's career would go next, if *Halston* and *Kenobi* suggested different paths or the same one. McGregor's performance in both promotes a type of determination in the face of wretchedness, a fuck-off to time, a youthfulness no matter a character's age. "Youthfulness is a big part of him," Thomson says. "He's very clever and competent. I imagine he's fun to be with – he gives that feeling." He adds, with a touch of concern, "I'm not sure what he's going to be like when he's 60."

"I've had a few moments where I've thought about doing something and going 'There's not much point, I probably don't have time,'" McGregor says, shaking his head. "Yeah, so that's a weird one."

We end the interview waving at each other through our computers, with plans to meet after McGregor returns from a press tour in Europe. It must be exhausting, I think as I shut my laptop, to be likeable all the time.

WHEN *KENOBI* BEGINS, Obi-Wan is hiding from the motherlode of midlife crises, though we're actually not sure how old he is. "We've never put an exact age," Deborah Chow, the series director, says, laughing. "Around Ewan McGregor-age-ish." *Kenobi* is a broken man. Traumatized. Most of his friends are dead, and the calling to which he's dedicated his life looks to be destroyed. "He's trying to live a normal, small life and he's lost," McGregor says. "He's carrying a lot of grief. He's carrying a lot of pain. He's tormented by this guilt about losing Anakin [to 'the dark side'] and not being able to stop that from happening. So that's where he is. And that's where we started talking about it."

Initially, *Kenobi* was meant to be a film. Five recent *Star Wars* movies crossed the billion-dollar mark in worldwide release: *The Phantom Menace*, *The Force Awakens*, *Rogue One*, *The Last Jedi*, and *The Rise of Skywalker*. But *Solo*, a 2018 spin-off, did a mere US\$390 million – which is a lot of zeroes to add up to a disappointment, but it was the first *Star Wars* movie to lose money. So, the powers-that-be at Lucasfilm and Disney turned the franchise toward smaller screens and stories, which has so far yielded *The Mandalorian*, the animated *Visions*, and *The Book Of Boba Fett*, with *Andor* and *Ahsoka* still to come.

"I actually love a limited series," Chow says. Before *Kenobi*, she directed two episodes of *The Mandalorian*. "It's a great format for doing a character story, in a similar way to how they've done things like *Logan* or *Joker*, where you take one character out of a big franchise and really get more in-depth. Obi-Wan is so iconic – everybody loves this character. But there was still so much to be explored."

Unlike the prequels, McGregor is both star and producer on *Kenobi*, meaning he was more involved in decision-making. The series was filmed using the StageCraft system, a new filming technology created for *The Mandalorian* by Industrial Light & Magic. In lieu of green and blue screens, it encircles a film set with high-definition video walls to create a backdrop for performers to respond to. McGregor and other cast members from the prequels have spoken publicly about their frustrations with the earlier screen work. At that point, the tech was cutting-edge, but isolating, offering little to

"HOMOEROTIC FAN ART GETS SENT TO ME. IT'S ALWAYS A BIT OF AN EYE-OPENER. YOU OPEN THE ENVELOPE, YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO SIGN SOMETHING, AND YOU'RE LIKE, 'FUCKING HELL!'"

conjure chemistry. "The more we went through the three movies I made with George, the less I was surrounded by anything," McGregor recalls. "I was on a blue screen for weeks or months, talking into thin air, and it's hard. It's just hard to do."

On *Kenobi*, the set was more alive. "It made us feel like we're there. When you're in the spaceship, the stars are flying past you and it feels real. I felt something very old Hollywood about it – it reminded me of those images of Hollywood in the '20s or '30s, where they had a row of sets. An actor would be playing a scene here, there'd be another actor there. It was like that, just super hi-tech. It's insane."

"The way they shoot, it's not computer graphics – they're real aliens," Kumail Nanjiani, one of McGregor's co-stars, says. "They have masks controlled by remotes. You're doing a scene and there's aliens with nostrils flaring, and it's wild. It looks like *Star Wars*."

McGregor first learned he'd been cast in the prequels while filming *Velvet Goldmine*, Todd Haynes' 1998 movie about glam rock in '70s Britain. "It was a huge departure from what I was doing. You think of those two films..." Maybe Disney should bring out an Obi-Wan *Kenobi* action figure in disco gear, I suggest. "Yeah, in leather flares and nothing else. There's a lot of homoerotic Obi-Wan/Hayden [Christensen] fan art that gets sent to me now and again. I don't know how it finds me. It's always a bit of an eye-opener. You open the envelope, you think you're going to have to sign something, and you're like, 'Fucking hell!'"

The idea of returning to *Star Wars* has hung over McGregor for more than a decade. "Years ago, there was a time everybody would end every interview with, 'Are you going to do porno?'" McGregor says. My jaw drops. He laughs: "Irvine Welsh wrote a sequel to *Trainspotting*, which was called *Porno*. And everyone asked if I was going to do that, and would immediately follow up, 'And what about Obi-Wan *Kenobi*, would you play him again?' I did a bit of social media then – I don't any more – but I would see it constantly, this question, are you going to do it again? Are you going to do it again?"

"With Ewan and Obi-Wan, he and the character just feel seamless," Chow says. She saw the new series as a bridge from the Zen master originated by Sir Alec Guinness to the more emotional character crafted by McGregor. "Obviously [Ewan] was a producer on *Kenobi*, he's more than just an actor. But he's lived with this character. Not only did he play it in the prequels, but he's asked to live with the public persona of being Obi-Wan."

If there's a burden in that, McGregor doesn't appear to feel it. He is delighted with *Kenobi* and ready to go again. "I really hope we do another," he says. "If I could do one of these every now and again – I'd just be happy about it." His prequels co-star Hayden Christensen returns in the series as Darth Vader, but this time in full regalia. In the movies they made,





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“IN ACTUAL FACT, I’D QUITE LIKE TO DO A FULL-ON ACTION FILM. I LIKE ALL THE TRAINING, I LIKE THE FIGHTING.”

Grave, *Trainspotting*, the under-appreciated *A Life Less Ordinary*. Those movies defined a zeitgeist. What had it been like to be one of the faces of that period – what was it like when the moment was done?

“It felt amazing to be Danny Boyle’s actor,” he says softly. He likened the relationship to the collaboration of US actor Martin Donovan and the director Hal Hartley, who cast Donovan in half a dozen films. “I thought, ‘I’m that to Danny.’ This is who I am, and it made me feel so great. Because I felt Danny Boyle was changing British cinema, and I was part of it.” Then Boyle cast Leonardo DiCaprio, rather than McGregor, in 2000’s *The Beach*. The two of them didn’t speak for years. McGregor has said he felt rudderless. He drank too much, partied too much. Constantly recognised in the street, in clubs: the highs and lows of a dream come true. “There’s something about the excitement of the fact that it’s happened which is hard to contain. I don’t know how well I did or didn’t contain it. I just know that my relationship with it is very different now.”

McGregor seemed not to regret those years, but happy to have survived them. (He and Boyle patched things up and resumed their friendship before making *T2 Trainspotting* in 2017.) “I don’t feel like that guy any more. I don’t have the same relationship with my fame. That’s to do with age and experience, also just a realisation of what works and what doesn’t. At that time, there was a hedonistic side to my life, which ended up not suiting the rest of my life.”

In the restaurant, he rolls his shoulders forward and stares intently when he listens. He doesn’t seem bothered by people identifying him, but does nothing to draw their stares. I ask if the character roles he chooses now, like *Halston* and *Fargo*, even *Kenobi*, make him happier than less complex parts – the action tropes many Hollywood actors might more easily slip into. “They’re more of a challenge,” he says. “I’m still just looking for the most interesting thing to do next. If you read an action hero on the page, there’s not much to play. But in actual fact, I’d quite like to do a full-on action film. I like all the training, I like the fighting.” He laughs. “So I actually am looking for a fucking action role to play.”

In addition to his new son with Winstead, McGregor has four daughters with his ex-wife Eve Mavrakis. If there is a constant to his performances, he says, it’s being a father. The absent dad in *Nanny McPhee Returns*. The haunted father in *American Pastoral*, which he directed. “I felt like it was a love letter to my girls,” he says. “A dad film, really.” One of his daughters, Jamyan, is adopted; McGregor met her for the first time when he and Boorman visited a shelter for Mongolian street children

the character didn’t yet merit a helmet – and the first time McGregor did a scene with Vader in full costume, “I got a jolt of fear that made me six years old again,” he says. “I’ve never experienced that before. I just about crapped my pants.”

ABOUT A WEEK after our first conversation, McGregor and I meet at Bike Shed LA, a motorcycle club in the arts district, an offshoot of the London branch in Shoreditch. (McGregor’s friend Boorman is an investor.) It’s a massive space with a bar, a restaurant, a tattoo parlour, a barbers. Everywhere are vintage motorcycles, Indians and Triumphs and Moto Guzzis. McGregor arrives on a Kawasaki Concours14 in a white T-shirt, blue jeans, and boots. He’s just returned from the press tour. Up close, his forehead is lined, but he doesn’t look tired. We sit in a quiet booth in the corner. As lunch arrives – we share pork ribs and chicken wings – he says, “I don’t ever see any sort of through-line in my work. Of course, it’s your job to look for that. But I really don’t.”

This was a theme of our conversations, that if McGregor has entered a new phase in mid-life – new show, new success, new marriage, new child – it’s not by grand design. He can be erratic, he says. He works by feeling. He can be accused of doing too much. I point out that for work he is constantly in front of cameras; and when he’s not acting, he and his best friend disappear for months to ride bikes and be vulnerable in front of yet more cameras.

He returns to the idea of being on a journey, regardless of the destination. In our first conversation he told me that he and Boorman had trouble initially selling their motorcycle show to networks because they wanted it to be about an epic quest – and that was it. “We couldn’t believe the sort of ideas that people wanted to slap on top of it. To make it a TV show to them, it had to be something else. And we were adamant that the journey is enough.”

I wonder if the journey is different when it’s constantly being documented. That being present in a moment perhaps isn’t the same when everything’s being filmed. “You do have to be comfortable with everything being captured,” he says. “And there are times where, when it gets stressful or something goes wrong, the last thing you want is a camera in your face. But that’s where the good stuff is.”

In our first conversation, we talked about what it’s like to be famous and to be a fan. I wanted to know if the two ever overlapped, if there was a moment when, despite his success, his visibility, he’s still one of us. McGregor says he used to be crazy for the band Oasis. “If you spoke to anybody who came around my house in the ’90s, it would always end up with *There and Then*, the video where they walk out and Noel’s got the Union Jack guitar. That went on after dinner and would bore everyone to death. I was in my twenties, but I was like a 14-year-old fan. It was kind of embarrassing.”

I tell him I’d been a big fan in the ’90s of the films he did with Danny Boyle – *Shallow*



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JW Anderson
trousers £440
Bode

during *Long Way Round*. McGregor has been an ambassador for UNICEF since 2004, and he and Boorman often visit their programmes during their expeditions.

“People talk about mental health, mindfulness,” Boorman tells me. “Today, when you talk to your friends, you don’t just ask, ‘How are you?’ You say, ‘How are you, really?’ Ewan’s always been like that.”

McGregor had mentioned that he recently made a film with his oldest daughter Clara – *You Sing Loud, I Sing Louder*, a film she conceived and developed with a screenwriter. They shot it last autumn in New Mexico, and it’s currently in post-production; when we meet, McGregor hasn’t talked about it publicly before. He became involved in the project a few years ago, when he saw Clara in New York City. “She tells me that she’d come up with an idea about writing about us. At first I was a bit nervous. I didn’t know what that meant.” The story would be a road trip: a father driving his daughter

“WHEN APPROACHING A ROLE, I AM BOTH A NERVOUS WRECK AND ABSOLUTELY SELF-ASSURED. BUT I FORGET BEFORE I START FILMING THAT I’M SELF-ASSURED.”

to rehab. “I got the script while I was making *Halston*. I sat down to read it and I was blown away. It was a beautiful story about us. There’s things that aren’t accurate, or are bent, but they still reflect our estrangement for a while.”

Did you drive your daughter...

“To a facility? No, that’s fictional. The drive is fictional. But for a couple of years, we sort of lost her. So the storyline is about her realising that she needs the help her father’s trying to give. Along the way, their relationship is healed somewhat.” He looks at me, pained, but also joyful. “I was so impressed by the story, by the humour. There’s a sort of recognition in it that made me very proud and at the same time very close to her. I felt like she understood more than I’d thought.”

Like a recognition of your position.

“My position, but also stuff about parenting somebody who’s in trouble. It’s a fucking horribly difficult situation to be in. You’re so scared of what can happen. You will do anything in the world to stop losing them.”

The film was shot with a small crew. He loved the production’s modesty, the relationship between him and his scene partner. “We play father and daughter,” he says. “It’s a reflection of us and our story. I was really impressed with her as an actor. It was just the most remarkable experience to be acting with her.”

Do you see ways that she is as an actor that reflect how you are as an actor? “I do. Because she just allowed herself. We didn’t discuss the scenes too much beforehand. And that’s what

I’m like. I’m not very interested in talking about stuff before I do it.”

McGregor is suddenly vulnerable. “A divorce in a family is a bomb going off in everyone’s life – my children’s lives,” he says. “The sort of healing of that is ongoing.”

None of this is easy for him to talk about. It isn’t his inclination. For the amount of time McGregor spends in front of cameras, he is a private person who doesn’t crave attention. I remember something Nanjiani told me, from working with McGregor, “When the cameras aren’t rolling, he’s just Ewan. It really struck me, one specific moment, he had a very emotional scene, and in between he was hanging out. I said, ‘Do you need a moment?’ He was like, ‘Nope.’ Some people you work with want to pull focus. He sets you up.”

I approached this article wanting to know what it was like, sitting on the metaphorical rumbling motorcycle that is a film star’s career, to look back and see dozens of roles behind you. What it feels like to try to envision what’s next. McGregor is entering his third decade of being an artist. He is aware of getting older, that not every option is on the table any more.

Lockdown changed his perspective. It had been decades since he’d spent seven or eight months in a single place. “I just want to be present. I don’t want to be away for four months in Romania. If it has to happen, maybe it has to happen, but I’m trying really hard not to do that,” he says. “Before, I just felt like a gypsy. I was always a dad first, but I was away a lot.”



McGregor has made California his home. He misses Scotland, being close to family, but Los Angeles is where his life is right now. We leave the club and walk out into a spring day in Southern California: cloudless sky, not too hot.

As we leave I ask McGregor if he has a sense of what type of actor he’ll likely be in the coming years. From my own experience, middle age can lead to self-acceptance, make you care less about what other people think, but also lead to new appetites and new ideas. “I don’t know,” he says. “I’m quite excited about it.” He thinks about it more. “I’m going to name-drop: I remember meeting Terry Gilliam...” He’d been sent a script. For more than 20 years, Gilliam had been trying to make a version of the film that became 2018’s *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. “He says, ‘What the fuck have you been doing all this time? You’ve been underplaying everything. What happened to the guy in *Trainspotting*? What happened to that guy?!’ It was quite rude. It’s rare that somebody challenges you. But it stuck with me.” As though he had taken the criticism on board. And the work now is maybe more free, even cathartic.

“Like when you were talking about *Fargo* and *Halston*. These are much bigger characters, and I really enjoy it. At the same time, I really enjoyed doing the thing with Clara,” McGregor says. “I was totally myself.” ❖

ROSECRANS BALDWIN’s latest book is *Everything Now: Lessons From the City-State of Los Angeles*.

CA PR ICo Rn

BY BRIANA YOUNGER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEE WEI SWEE

STYLING BY MATTHEW JOSEPHS

With revelatory fresh music and her big screen debut on the way, a newly emboldened FKA twigs is an artist in her ascendancy.

R I S I NG



BEFORE FKA TWIGS

arrived at a quaint coffee shop in Los Angeles' Arts District, she'd been on the phone with a friend, wondering whether she was intimidating. It had been a recurring theme in the 34-year-old's life of late – it'd come up at least three times over the previous two weeks – and she wanted to know if it was true.

Much of the mythology that's been built around twigs over the past decade has to do with this quality, or at least the assumption of it. Her songs and videos have an enigmatic feel that can be confounding yet stunning at the same time, the kind of art that draws you in whether its precise meaning is clear or not. Unable to assign a genre that felt exactly right, some critics settled for avant-garde, a description that, by definition, suggests a level of inaccessibility. For a while, she didn't give a lot of interviews.

But when twigs, real name Tahliah DeBrett Barnett, arrives on a sunny April morning, there is little intimidating about her. There's no security, no assistants in tow. It's just her – petite in stature, cosy in attire, warm in manner. She immediately apologises for her slight tardiness; years of spending time in the city's sprawl and she still underestimates just how far apart things are. Relatable. For this particular trip, she's been in town for a few weeks, working on new music even though her last project, a kaleidoscopic mixtape titled *CAPRISONGS*, came out only three months earlier.

That release contains some of twigs' most immediate music. Her moody, experimental streak is there of course, but it's also breezy

and playful – the closest thing to club jams she's made thus far. Though it's the soundtrack of a blurry night out with friends, these are songs born of the crushing isolation of the pandemic. It was an attempt to imagine her way out of all that uncertainty and turmoil, to manifest some semblance of normalcy and levity where none existed. But she didn't know that at the time; her approach to creating is more like, just start and see what happens. "It's often only after the fact that I can really talk about where I was emotionally or mentally or what the work was supposed to represent," she says. "I see that it was like a yearning to be a side of myself that I hadn't been for a while, and I think it was a search for connection and also reconnection with myself and my heritage. I think being Black and British is a very particular flavour."

Raised in the spa town of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, twigs has long been hyper aware of what it means to be Black and British. She was one of very few people of colour in her area, raised by her mum, who is of English and Spanish ancestry, and stepdad, who is Bajan. (Her biological father is Jamaican.) Since she was young, people have seemed to stare at her – in part due to her skin colour but also her general appearance. "I was like a really crazy-looking kid," she says, pulling out her phone. Her mum likes to send her old pictures, and twigs soon finds one she recently received. In the photo, a baby twigs poses; she's not so much "crazy-looking" as supremely cute and uncannily doll-like, her distinct facial features

already evident. The staring continued even as she got older, but feeling outcast helped her to "get over [her]self" at a young age and figure out how to be comfortable in her own skin. Moving to London at age 17 proved a game-changer. "It was really good for my spirit just to be around loads of different types of people and different religions and everyone looking different. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, really."

She spent a few years savouring the multicultural melting pot and being a backing dancer for pop stars like Jessie J and Ed Sheeran. In between, she was experimenting with music herself. At 19, she booked a plane ticket to LA with plans to get familiar with hip-hop's krumping scene in the place where it originated. A British krump crew called Wet Wipez had welcomed her into their ranks – her 2014 video of the same name features them – but immersion within a culture has always been important to twigs. It can be the difference between appreciation and appropriation, between adding to rather than solely taking from. Using Facebook, she contacted Miss Prissy, a South LA native also known as the Queen of Krump, who told her where to go once she touched down. "This is before Google Maps, so I just got off the bus, just asking people like, 'Where's this road? Where's this alley? Okay, like four blocks.'" Thinking about this in the era when smartphones might as well be an extra limb sounds stressful, but twigs reflects fondly on the adventure of it and how she was embraced. "I remember all of those dancers, like Worm and Tight Eyez and Prissy.

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Shaun Leane



And these are people that I'm still following what they're doing, and I'm still kind of connected to spiritually."

When she later got into voguing – see her 2015 video for "Glass & Patron" for a sample – it was a similar experience. This time, she found herself in New York City, home to the ball culture that birthed the style. "I was just going to Escuelita's, and it was before I was even a well-known artist," she remembers, referencing the legendary (and now closed) LGBTQ+ nightclub in Hell's Kitchen. Among the Black and Latino purveyors of vogue, she found a comforting familiarity that reminded her of the "very queer community" that she feels most at home with back in London. "Before I was famous, the ballroom scene [in New York] kind of just took me in and wanted me to go out and wanted me to dance and show me. And I think there's an authenticity in the spirit of being an outsider in a way, and finding family."

Hundreds of millions of views and streams later, a Grammy nomination and, most recently, *NME*'s Godlike Genius award (she's the first Black woman to receive the honour), twigs still considers herself a bit of a misfit. It's difficult to square – how someone so loved and respected could also be under the radar. "I've been that, and it's funny, because even now, in what I do, I still feel like that. Even though now I'm a more successful artist, I still feel completely on it, the fringes."

But perhaps that's also the paradox of any marginalised person or group. It's being visible without being seen, consumed without being cared for, imitated without being understood. It can be frustrating and thankless, especially for those who may never be able to turn their creativity into a living, but twigs recognises the imbalance and tries to help bridge the gap. "I always want to learn, and I always want to listen," she says. "I think subcultures and outsiders are the most important parts of society. They literally start everything."

CAPRISONGS RETURNS TWIGS to the UK. It's her most collaborative project to date, and, likewise, many of the artists she worked with have roots here, as does much of her palette of sounds. Pa Salieu, a rapper from Coventry, lends a verse to electro-bass of "honda"; Shygirl, a rapper and DJ from South London, features on the dancehall throwback "papi bones"; Dystopia, a band from East London, appears on the whimsical pop of "which way." The mixtape's locality reached altogether serendipitous levels on the drill track "darjeeling," which calls on Homerton rapper Unknown T and West Midlands singer-songwriter Jorja Smith.

Lyrically, it's an ode to London and the liberating joy of moving from a small town to the big city; behind-the-scenes, it turned out to be a family affair when twigs and Smith realised they were cousins. "I'd never met her before, and I jumped in her car with her... and I remember thinking to myself, 'Gosh, that's really strange. We've got exactly the same kind of skin,' twigs recalls. She noted a yellow undertone that resembled her own and figured she'd inquire about the colour of foundation Smith uses. Not thinking too much more of it, the pair recorded the song and afterwards kept hanging out and eventually became friends. "A few months later, I was on the road to go to LA and [Jorja] left me a voice note saying 'you're never going to believe this, but I've just spoken to my dad and he's spoken to his sister and we're related.'"

The mixtape also allowed twigs to reconnect with some of the creative quirks that had been stuffed away in service of a more cohesive aesthetic. Her previous projects all share a metallic, almost vaporous quality that traffics heavily in atmosphere; *CAPRISONGS*, by comparison, is a collage of textures and colours. As a listener, it sounds revelatory, like twigs doing away with years of measured restraint. To her, it's just leveling up. "I didn't feel trapped, I felt like I was just being myself," she says of her previous iterations.

"But I guess I just unlocked a new door, like a video game. It's not even like I broke out. I think I just unlocked another level. It's so good."

Film taps into yet another side. In twigs' own work, she's the one responsible for building a world and then pulling everyone into it; with film, it's already done for her and she becomes a small part of someone else's vision. In the case of *The Crow*, that's Rupert Sanders (*Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Ghost in the Shell*). In this remake of the '90s cult hit, twigs stars as Shelly Webster, the fiancée of the titular character (played by Swedish actor Bill Skarsgård of *It* fame), and takes it as her responsibility to bring Sanders' ideas – which she describes as a "beautiful, romantic Gothic world" – to life as clearly as she can.

Back in London, a few weeks after our LA meet, she's just connected with the costume designers for the film, Kurt and Bart, the duo also responsible for the superhero threads in DC Comics' forthcoming *Black Adam*. They began dreaming up ideas for looks for her character, "The first day that I began to meet Shelly," she says. She took them to Fantastic Toiles, a boutique founded by designer Nasir Mazhar and located in Forest Gate, an unassuming creative hub in East London that is far and away from the capital's more obviously high-fashion postcodes. The Instagram for the shop reflects a well-curated, eccentric, sometimes theatrical selection of pieces. Twigs describes it as one of the only "real, genuine artistic scenes happening in London at the moment."

"It's sort of a celebration of fashion and art and handmade things, and everyone puts all of these clothes in a railway arch and they play gabba music," twigs explains over Zoom, the day after her trip to the shop. "It was special because I took Kurt and Bart there and they were able to see a bit of my London that I really love." They met a handful of designers who they may work with when it's time to style her; it's all still very much early days, but it's a start. "It felt,

**"I GUESS I JUST UNLOCKED
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"ONE OF THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WHOLE OF MY LIFE WAS KEEPING MY SHIT TOGETHER."

in that way, that Shelly began to come to life, almost as if she even began to find where she might have found her clothes or friends that she might have."

The idea of meeting someone through their fashion sense is especially well-suited for twigs. She's as attentive to the details of her looks as she is that of her songs and videos, and it's through her image that she imbues her music with extra gravity. This is one of the qualities that her friend and Culture Club frontman Boy George appreciates about her. "I feel like this is a time when anyone can dress up as anything, but certain artists have a kind of authenticity when they step into a certain outfit," he says over the phone. "I've been seeing some amazing Black girls doing punk looks that are just so authentic, but there's just something about that switch. I think this applies also to twigs – she's got this alternative take on it." On the spot, George coins the term "funky punky" to capture what he means about how she takes a reference point and transforms it into a look all her own. But it was the theatricality of her performance in the "cellophane" video that first sparked his admiration.

THE RELEASE OF "CELLOPHANE", in April 2019, formally marked twigs' return following her debut. In the accompanying music video, she pole-dances, her body carrying her into the heavens before she falls into an underworld. It's a sublime display of healing rendered as mastery. She'd spent the year before learning the craft as she recovered from laproscopic surgery to remove uterine fibroids, as well as sexual trauma. "[Pole dancing] was linked to certain things in my past that helped me reclaim myself as a woman and really see my body, I think, for what it could do rather than what it looked like," she says. "I'd spent the whole of my life looking at my mirror thinking, 'Oh, I don't like that bit' or 'I wish this was different.' And when I was pole dancing, it was the first time where I was, 'This is who I am. My sexuality is for me.'"

Twigs incorporated pole dancing into her live shows that year. Again and again, she found freedom on the stage in the months leading up

to the release of *Magdalene*, her second album, in November that year. At the time, listeners couldn't help but speculate that the lyrics were about the end of her relationship with Robert Pattinson, then still best known as Edward from *Twilight*. In interviews, she gracefully answered questions about healing from heartache in addition to the physical ailments she'd faced. It wasn't until December of the following year, when twigs filed a lawsuit against ex-boyfriend, the actor Shia LaBeouf, accusing him of physical and psychological abuse, that it became clear she was dealing with a lot more. It's hard to imagine how it must've felt then, to be holding on to such a painful secret, discussing the past when the wounds of the present are still raw. Looking back, she's now able to admire her composure.

"One of the greatest achievements of the whole of my life was keeping my shit together. It was one of the things that I'm most proud of, that I was able to go on tour and do interviews and stay graceful and keep that calmness," she says. "I don't even know if it's right or wrong that I was able to do that. I look at that as a testament to my upbringing and a testament to how much I love my art and a testament to how much I want to show up for people that bought tickets to my gig, because sometimes it was so difficult."

She was still touring in support of *Magdalene* when stories about coronavirus began to appear in the news, and she started to hear industry whispers about insurance problems in the event of future cancellations. In January 2020, she was traveling in the US and randomly decided to watch the 2011 thriller *Contagion* on a flight. It drove home to her the precarity of the situation. By February, she was making plans to hunker down. "I just knew it was going to be bad, and I just felt like we were being massively gaslit that this was just going to go on for six weeks, you know?"

And this is where at least one bubble gets popped. Twigs is a singular artist who has been helping to bring the peripheral to the centre and remaking music aesthetics in her image for the better part of a decade. Her songs have been

featured in TV shows like *Mr. Robot*, *Power* and *I May Destroy You*. She has the affiliations and the accolades. By most any measure, she is successful. But – and she hesitates to share at first – she was not in an especially comfortable financial position when the pandemic hit. She's only talking about it now because she says it's important that people know the reality. And the reality is that she nearly lost her home.

"I came really close, and it made me pay attention and learn a lot about things that I never really paid attention to before, because I've always been on the go," she says, running down the list from studio to video to press to show, rinse and repeat. Until now, the business of being twigs ran partially through Young (formerly Young Turks), the indie label she's been signed to since the beginning, and through herself, with her partners largely working on retainers. That means when the British government was giving out loans to small businesses, she didn't quite qualify, and when all her shows got cancelled – at least 22 in that first year alone – she had no income. "I felt like the Titanic, and I said to everybody, 'I'm just going to keep on paying everyone until I can't afford to pay anyone any more.' And ooh, it got so close."

She relays her upbringing – growing up in a working class family, on benefits and in social housing. A home to call her own has been a place of safety, and coming to the brink of losing it was a humbling and eye-opening experience. As she watched her bank balance tick down and down, she thought of her collaborators and the people who were relying on her. ("I wanted to do the right thing and just try to keep supporting the creatives around me," she says.) But she also thought of herself and the journey that had led her to this point.

Before the pandemic highlighted just how thin the threads that hold a life together can be, it was easy to not think about the intricacies of this or that agreement. As long as the money was flowing and she was able to create, she could afford a little naiveté. Now, though, she says she will never, ever live that life again, and that's a matter of learning to feel like she's capable and worthy of participating in those discussions.

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"SOMETIMES, STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF IS MESSY. BUT I DID AND I'M PROUD OF IT, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO ME WASN'T RIGHT."

"It has been intimidating for me being a young woman running a business because I felt like I didn't deserve to understand everything. I felt like I didn't deserve to understand the contracts – or even, sometimes now, when you do a song, there's royalties, publishing, there's points, there's who gets paid first." It sounds daunting, but she breaks it down like it's become second nature. She's finally in control. "I'm learning, and I want to make my own mistakes. I don't want other people to make mistakes and then me not understand what's happened."

She emphasises that this is no pity party. On the contrary, she sees the ordeal as a more positive experience than not. She saw the bottom closing in and she took the opportunity to learn from it. That she's talking about this at all isn't even about her – she's bouncing back, starting a collective and recently signing a deal with Atlantic Records, which will represent her in the US where she has a larger audience. ("It's not that I don't feel the love in the UK, because I definitely do, but it is kind of on a different level in America," she says.) But she wants others like her to take control of their destiny, to not be "so grateful to have a seat at the table" that they forget to read the small print.

"I think it's important for specifically young women in a creative industry to have the confidence to understand their business and have the confidence to understand their worth and have the confidence to want more for themselves," she says, tacking on a reminder that it's okay to ask questions. It's okay to not be the most studied or still be in command of what aligns and what doesn't.

It's also for a similar reason that she came forward with her story as a survivor of domestic abuse. She doesn't retread the horrific details, and she doesn't need to – they are available and on the public record as part of her civil lawsuit against LeBeouf (he has claimed "many of these allegations are not true") which is due to go to court next spring.

Never did twigs imagine going through something like that, let alone speaking about it in the open. Her intention was to release the pain so that she may once again be healed and so that others, also like her, can maybe somehow find a

way to do the same. "I just didn't want anyone else to get hurt, and that trumped any way that I felt about what people may think about me now, positively or negatively."

To that end, she lent her celebrity to an organisation called Sistah Space that provides resources to survivors of abuse with a particular focus on people of African heritage. Its operations manager, Djanomi Headley, says twigs has become "like family," collaborating with drop-ins, material support and raising awareness of the organisation's work. Headley credits her with helping to secure enough signatures for parliament to debate Valerie's Law, which would ensure mandatory cultural competency training for police officers and others to respond to the specific needs of Black women in domestic violence situations. The endorsement, Headley says, "created a huge snowball effect and gained us the necessary exposure to ensure that the voice and perspective of Black women affected by domestic abuse were seen and heard." The significance of twigs' decision to use her voice is not lost on Headley. "Twigs advocating for survivors is saying, 'Whilst the world is looking at me, I am choosing to look at you. I am seeing you, I am hearing you and I will use my position to ensure that others do, too.'"

Speaking up thrust her private life into the spotlight in ways she'd largely managed to avoid before. It wasn't an easy decision, but it was the one she needed to make – not just right now, but for the future, for the babies she might have and for the silence and shame she refuses to pass on. "If I ever have children, I want them to know that I stood up for myself, and that's important. And sometimes, standing up for yourself is messy. Sometimes it can cause more trauma, and sometimes it can be dividing. People don't expect you to stand up for yourself, but I did and I'm proud of it, and what happened to me wasn't right."

IF THAT ALL seems like a lot to take on, it's because it is. And if people think her ability to survive and thrive and create intentioned and regenerative art through it all makes her or her work intimidating, then that's probably not about her. Which is what her friend was telling

her before she arrived at the cafe and sat down for tea and fruit she barely got to eat in between chatting. "You just really know who you are, and you're so still, and you're okay with that. And if you don't want to say something, you'll just sit there and be quiet," she says the friend told her. "But do you know what?" twigs lights up a bit as she asks, like an epiphany is coming into focus. "When you think something of someone, it's usually just a reaction – it's like a reflection of something you don't like about yourself."

CAPRISONGS may be the most comprehensive portrait of her yet. She's FKA twigs, the dancer who will travel around the globe just to throw herself into a world that interests her and get to know the makers of it. She's the daughter who receives old photos and thoughtful quotes from her mum ("The world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence, a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related," reads one) and several-minutes-long voice memos from her dad, playing the entirety of a song he simply wanted to share with her. (His most recent choices include D'Angelo's "Brown Sugar" and something that sounds like the Pablo Flores remix of "Mi Tierra".) She was the kid who, at eight, used to write her own songs and sing them in the back seat of the car over the radio – "Don't get upset, learn to chill, no one cries over milk that you spill, do the dupe," one goes as she chants it over our follow-up Zoom call.

Being twigs hasn't always been easy, and she's been open about that, but she presses on. And maybe what people deem to be intimidating is actually resolve and self-possession. Maybe it's the fact she's "so broken" and "so vulnerable" and yet "so comfortable." Maybe it's what the world calls a Black woman who is unafraid to enforce her boundaries and speak and live in her truth, no matter what. Maybe it's the cost of refusing to justify your existence. "I'm never going to explain myself," twigs says, "but if I have to prove myself in a situation – if I have to prove that I deserve to be there – I will do that every single time." ❖

BRIANA YOUNGER is a writer based in LA.

Rowan



Atkinson



Still Has Us in Stitches

For over 40 years – from *Bean* to *Blackadder* – we’ve known his supremely subversive silliness. But Rowan Atkinson rarely allows a peek behind the curtain. The man famous for playing extraordinary fools is happier that way.

By Tanya Gold Photographs by Marcin Kempinski Styled by Rose Forde



OWAN ATKINSON

is grave and shy, and so his career has the structure of a joke: a grave, shy man fated to make others laugh. It's a good joke: Atkinson is the most successful British comic actor since Peter Sellers and Dudley Moore. His global franchises – *Johnny English* and *Mr Bean* – have made hundreds of millions of pounds. With *Mr Bean*, he almost single-handedly dug physical comedy from its grave. With *Blackadder* – he calls it, very formally, *The Blackadder*, which makes me laugh – he created the best British sitcom character of our lifetimes, and *Blackadder* is very talkative. But all comedy is subjective, as he says. He is 67 and has been famous for more than 40 years.

You would not guess this if you met him: he is so understated. I find Atkinson at the door of a London hotel. He is slender and more handsome than Mr Bean. He wears a fine wool coat, but he has a slight tendency to dandy: he once sent a purple coffee cup belonging to Mel Smith to McLaren so they could match it to a car, though he cannot remember if he chose the purple in the end. He moves like a dancer preparing for a stage, and this interview is a performance too. He treasures his privacy, and I have been told that, though he is pleased to discuss his work, he will not answer any personal questions. His voice is quiet and low: RP with the flat vowels of Newcastle beneath. His Geordie accent, when he chooses to do it, is a scream, though he once said it was “thrashed out” of him. We sit down in a drawing room. He pours tea from an enormous teapot. He switches a recording app on. He eats a piece of toast very delicately. He coughs.

We are here to discuss *Man vs Bee*, his new show for Netflix, in which he plays a gentle and despairing man called Trevor who house-sits a monstrous modernist home and goes to war with a bee. The comedy is incremental and horrifying, like Basil Fawlty's average day, but with Atkinson's larger gift for physical comedy – and a bee that seems to emote, like a love interest. He based Trevor on a kidnap victim he invented for his breakthrough, the early '80s BBC sketch show *Not the Nine O'Clock News*, and gives him every expression of bafflement and rage. “I played a kidnap victim who was making a video from the kidnapper's lair in order to ask for ransom for himself,” he says. “All he talks about is what good scrambled eggs the kidnappers make. ‘There's oregano in there.’” Trevor is a good man. Trevor loves to please.

Atkinson speaks in long, careful sentences that strive for balance. His speech is analytical, almost donnish; occasionally he stammers. When he is relaxed, he will mug for the tape, though slightly. I have the impression of a man who holds himself tightly under control. Trevor is, he says, “a very sweet and good-natured man [who] has his obsessive side. Which means he gets obsessed with problems that actually there's no need to get obsessed with.” I have developed an urge to save Trevor, and Atkinson explains why this is impossible, even undesirable. “‘Just leave the blooming bee alone,’ would be a sound piece of advice to convey to him but he doesn't,” he says. “He can't.” He obviously likes Trevor: “I think he's one of the more pleasant people I've played.” I ask him – of all the people you have played, who are you closest to? Walter Goodfellow, he says, the vicar in the 2005 black comedy *Keeping Mum*: a gentle, bookish introvert so fixated on writing the perfect sermon he doesn't notice his wife is sleeping with Patrick Swayze.

I tell him I found Trevor's story unbearable because I care about him, and he can speak to this. “Tragedy and comedy are extremely close bedfellows,” Atkinson says, “and you can't really have one without the other. Every joke



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has a victim, whether fictional or non-fictional or notional, ideological or human and therefore, there's always someone suffering if there's a joke. I suppose you have to accept that's the way it is." I think of his early short film *Dead on Time*, the story of a man who is told he has only 30 minutes to live and tries to cram a lifetime into those minutes. For instance, he reads the back page of *War and Peace*. It's a misdiagnosis though, and when the doctor shouts, from across a road, that he won't die, he erupts with joy. Then he is killed by a lorry.

Until he was 20, Atkinson thought he would be an electrical engineer. He was born in Consett, near Newcastle, to a wealthy farming family. He was educated at the Chorister School in Durham and then at St Bees, a private school on the Irish Sea. He was a "reasonably happy" child, he says, "but quite quiet. I was quite a quiet, relatively introspective child who changed when he performed. I found a way of being extremely unshy." He says he is not like some comedians, who are always funny, like Peter Cook, who he performed with in *Blackadder*: but these ones, I notice, can be self-destructive. They are not functional, like he is. They tend to alcoholism. They die young. "I definitely need a script," he notes, "and quite a lot of rehearsal to be funny."

He loved cinema. He ran the school film society and once watched Jacques Tati's *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* four times in one day. He loved mending things too: he kept a screwdriver in his top pocket, tinkered with tractors, and learnt to rewire a house. He can still rewire a house, he says: "even with the advance of technology since the last century". At the Edinburgh Festival, he mended the photocopier in the fringe office. At the Almeida Theatre in Islington, he wired a plug. He finds it "very pleasing and satisfying". It feels like an ordering of his world; and, of course, now I imagine him as an electrician; a mechanic; a plumber. He has, at least superficially, that quality of sublime ordinariness.

He took a degree in electrical and electronic engineering at Newcastle University and then went to Oxford University for a masters: his thesis was on self-tuning control systems. And there he met Richard Curtis, later the writer of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Love Actually* and the friend who changed his life. In a big flat on the fringes of Oxford they wrote sketch comedy together. Richard "identified me as somebody who could bring scripts to life, and I identified him as somebody who could write scripts," Atkinson recalls. "So, there was a natural synergy and connection between us but also, we just got on terribly, terribly well and made each other laugh. It just worked." People who knew him at Oxford said his work was already "fully formed".

They had such great success with one sketch show, they took it to Edinburgh. Then he wrote letters to agents, and was taken on by Richard Armitage, who soothed his parents due to his resemblance to a bank manager, and who

represented Atkinson until he died. Then he and Curtis moved on to *Not the Nine O'Clock News* and he was famous at 24.

He enjoyed duality. On his first appearance on the talk show *Parkinson* in 1981 he played his "ranting man" from *Not the Nine O'Clock News* from the studio audience. He stood up in costume and ranted as Parkinson introduced Rowan Atkinson. "Come on, for God's sake. Hurry up. He's so slow," he shouted. "There's some poor twat stuck behind that bit of cardboard there trying to get on while his life slips away while this Russell Harty clone down here tells his life story! It's pathetic!" Then he takes off his coat, becomes Rowan Atkinson the interviewee, sits down with Parkinson and whispers his first answer.

He understates the success: Atkinson understates everything off screen. "It was just a hobby that turned into a job really," he says. "I enjoyed it more at the beginning. It's always more fun when you're 19." Everything is, I say. "But when you're 10 years older," he goes on, "it all becomes far more serious and you're far more worried about success or failure. Whereas that abandon you feel when you're young, when you really don't care – you don't care what part you play. You write a sketch about a pharmacy."

He imagines how this plays out. "Do you want to play the pharmacist or the customer?" "I don't care, shall I play the pharmacist?" "Yes, you play the customer. We'll go from there." "Whereas now," – and he speaks very seriously – "you say, 'Should I play the pharmacist – at this point in my career?'" He giggles.

I ask if it made him happy. "It did," he says, "I'm frequently a very happy person I should say." He coughs, as if to underline it. "But at the same time, I tend not to be happy when I'm doing the work. But I'm happy when I look back on the work. I'm happy having done the work. The doing I find tricky."

He explains: "Even when I look at something like *Man vs Bee*, which I think is basically sound – I think it's got some good moments – at the same time, in my sort of glass-half-empty approach, I look at it and I think, yeah but what about all those other moments that aren't as funny? I've thought that about every *Mr Bean* and *Johnny English* movie that I've ever made."

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"Tragedy and comedy are extremely close bedfellows, and you can't really have one without the other."



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tie £95
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Fame, too, Atkinson struggled with: "I much prefer, as a private individual, to keep my cards very close to my chest," he says. "I don't really want to be known as an individual. I want to be known for the work, not who I am or what I think." I respect this, but it does stymie our interview slightly because I can only ask him questions about his work, and so the whole enterprise feels like an offensive version of Cluedo in which I am looking for a live body. Are you really Mr Bean? Or Johnny English? At one point I forget myself and ask about his parents' response to his comedy career, and he very politely refuses to answer, and I feel terrible for asking.

He's a hard man to press because he seems so gentle; pliant almost, but I suspect that is one of his gifts. He's a physical comedian first. His body – his expression – can do almost anything. It can make him seem shy – or steely. People sometimes ask him to perform when he meets them on the street. This makes him uncomfortable, because it is "expecting you to perform out of the performance, out of the context in which performance is expected. I perform on stage or in front of a camera." I love the grandness of this statement: he has earned it. "I don't perform in King's Cross station. I'm not" – his eyes widen – "a performing flea. Maybe I'm saying that I need to be paid in order to perform."

After *Not the Nine O'Clock News* came *Blackadder*, the BBC period sitcom that ran for four series throughout the '80s. I love Edmund, but he doesn't. "A fairly cold character," he says, "funny in his outlook but" – and he pauses, and quietens his voice for the punchline – "not someone you'd really want to have lunch with." He saw Edmund as a "braying twit", which he is in series one, all rolling tongue and mad eyes. Atkinson likes playing grotesques: it speaks to something in him. People who can't do anything. People who are useless.

The first series was considered a failure. Ben Elton was brought in to turn *Blackadder* from a grotesque to a sophisticate, and it was all filmed indoors on wobbling sets and half of Flashheart's moustache fell off. When I saw the transformation from Atkinson's Edmund to Elton's, I realised how gifted he is. Because the first *Blackadder* is repulsive to look at, repulsive even to imagine. The second *Blackadder* is defiantly sexy with his malice, his black leather and his snarl. When I tell him this, he looks briefly panicked. Then he thanks me politely.

But Atkinson won't accept even the premise that he is gifted. His *Blackadder* colleague Stephen Fry called it fate. "Rowan has not an ounce of showbiz in him," he said. "It is as if God had an extra jar of comic talent and for a joke, gave it to a nerdy anoraked northern chemist." It's a good line but I don't believe it, because it separates the source of his comedy from himself, and that is impossible.

Atkinson tells me the central joke of *Blackadder*. "He's more a victim than anything else," he says. "He has superiority over Baldrick but obviously he's very much under those for

"I tend not to be happy when I'm doing the work. I'm happy having done the work. The doing I find tricky."

whom he works." He is "that slightly downtrodden but clearly quite intelligent man who genuinely thinks that he deserves better, and he should be doing much better than he is but somehow circumstances have conspired against him. He's just that bloke in the middle, isn't he? Who's not going to go up or down." That's the law of sitcom, after all: "The characters should never learn. At the end of the series, they should be as dim and narrow minded and set in their ways as they were at the beginning." And, of course, as soon as he deconstructs it for me, it doesn't sound funny any more. There must always be a victim. No victim, no joke.

He very rarely watches his work when it's finished. When I mention *The Tall Guy* – Richard Curtis's first feature film, in which Atkinson plays an evil stand-up comic called Ron Anderson – I watch him remember the jokes. He recounts a scene where Anderson marks the leaving of a long-standing employee by drinking a bottle of champagne at the party all by himself. "I'm getting flashing images," he says, "a flashback of the tiny bottle of champagne, the smallest bottle of champagne you've ever seen. It's always fun to play a villain and he was a villain." He asks me where I saw it. YouTube, I tell him, and I wonder if he will watch it.

He doesn't watch them usually, he says, because he finds "the business of making things, of acting, of performing very, very stressful so usually the pain and the difficulty of making something is all I'm feeling when I'm watching it". Putting time between himself and the experience helps. He once found an episode of *Blackadder* – season four, Miranda Richardson as the nurse – on a plane, and he allowed himself to watch it. "I thought, actually, this is quite funny. This is quite good."

I ask him if he has ever looked back on a piece of work and thought: I couldn't have done that better. "No," he says instantly, and his voice goes very quiet, almost a whisper, and to himself, "No, no, no." But then, as he says, he doesn't really give himself the chance. He sees it all the way through and walks away, "praying that it earns the cash to justify its cost."

And what makes you laugh? "Hmmm," he says. "Not much is the answer." He ponders and names John Cleese, Barry Humphries, Charlie Chaplin, Jacques Tati and Sacha Baron Cohen. That's two middle-class madmen, two geniuses of silent comedy and a man with the courage to act while others remain themselves. Tati inspires him: "no fast cutting.

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Virtually no dialogue. Just watching silly comic situations slowly evolve before your very eyes.” It speaks to Atkinson’s patience.

Fawlty Towers looms too: it is the reason they set the original *Blackadder* in the 15th century where Basil, stranded in Torquay in the 20th, could not compete. He considers Cleese’s performance as the raging hotel owner in the classic BBC sitcom. “Just brilliant...” and he pauses. “Legs...” – and the “legs” is almost breathless. “And his writing and his performance style.” It is, he says, “on the edge of mania and that is very funny, particularly from the educated middle-class ‘behave well’ perspective. When you see someone portraying someone from that background pushed to the limit of sanity and good behaviour. The repression.” Barry Humphries is the same. He grew up in airless, stultifying Melbourne, with bourgeois ideas a knife at his throat.

Atkinson particularly admires “people who are fearless, people who take stuff to the edge.” He names Baron Cohen’s *Borat* “the most extraordinary creation. It really is where life meets art: where you put a fictional character into a non-fictional situation. That’s a very brave and weird thing to do.” His face shows delight. “Because you really do not know what’s going to happen – there is a complete disconnect between the performer and those among whom he is performing. I admire the courage.”

Johnny English is a daydream. He wouldn’t exist without another daydream, which is James Bond. In the *Johnny English* films, the spy is absurd; in James Bond, the audience is. It adds to his canon of ludicrous vicars and ludicrous schoolmasters: respectable people to whom terrible things – such as being known – happen.

Atkinson doesn’t like Johnny either. To Atkinson, English is, he says, “just a fairly two-dimensional, self-obsessed individual who doesn’t really show any kindness or empathy. He’s good but crucially – and this is where the comedy comes in – he’s not as good as he thinks he is.” It works as a critique of the British character and nation. “He thinks he’s better than he is and it’s that differential and discrepancy between his ambition and his capability. That’s where the joke lies.” I think he’s being too hard on Johnny English. I watch all three films that week and Johnny English loves children. He teaches a class of schoolchildren to say: “You look particularly attractive tonight” while holding martini glasses. Then he gives them jelly babies made of gelignite, so they can blow up the world.

We move to his most famous creation: the grotesque Mr Bean, who, he says, is “very strange, extremely selfish and self-centred”. He based him on “myself as a child. I feel as though it’s me as a nine-year-old – or me as an 11-year-old – because he’s essentially a child trapped in a man’s body. That’s how I’ve always seen him. He’s got the innocence but also the anarchic instinct and the unpleasantness, the uncompromisingness of children. They don’t take a particularly sophisticated view of the world and that is both Mr Bean’s strength and his problem.”

Its global appeal “was a deliberate aim. The international market.” He was in Venice in 1985, listening to Daniel Barenboim and Duran Duran (intellectual meets nerd) and pondering how musicians will “presume an international audience for their work and yet in comedy we don’t. It tends to be a very parochial thing.”

Until Mr Bean appeared in 1990, “There was absolutely zero tradition of purely visual comedy on television,” Atkinson says. “Television comedy was about words. It had inherited the traditions of radio. Visual comedy was just deemed to be very esoteric, arty stuff that you might see on a Saturday morning as children’s entertainment, or you might see extremely late at night.”

When I ask Atkinson if he enjoys playing Mr Bean, he says yes and no. “It’s stressful to be me playing him in terms of the context of a film set. I worry very much whether I am doing the right thing: whether I am performing him or telling the story as well as I could. There’s always a belief that I’m not. But that’s more my problem than his.” On the other hand, because “Bean is such a weird man and – I like to think, at least – far removed from my own personality, the distance I have to move in order to play him is actually very reassuring. It’s like entering a completely different world and I’m very happy in his world.”

He explains by telling me about a book signing at Harrods as Mr Bean, “in character and in costume”. He arrived in a horse and carriage and Mohamed Al-Fayed, who owned Harrods then, came to meet him. “He

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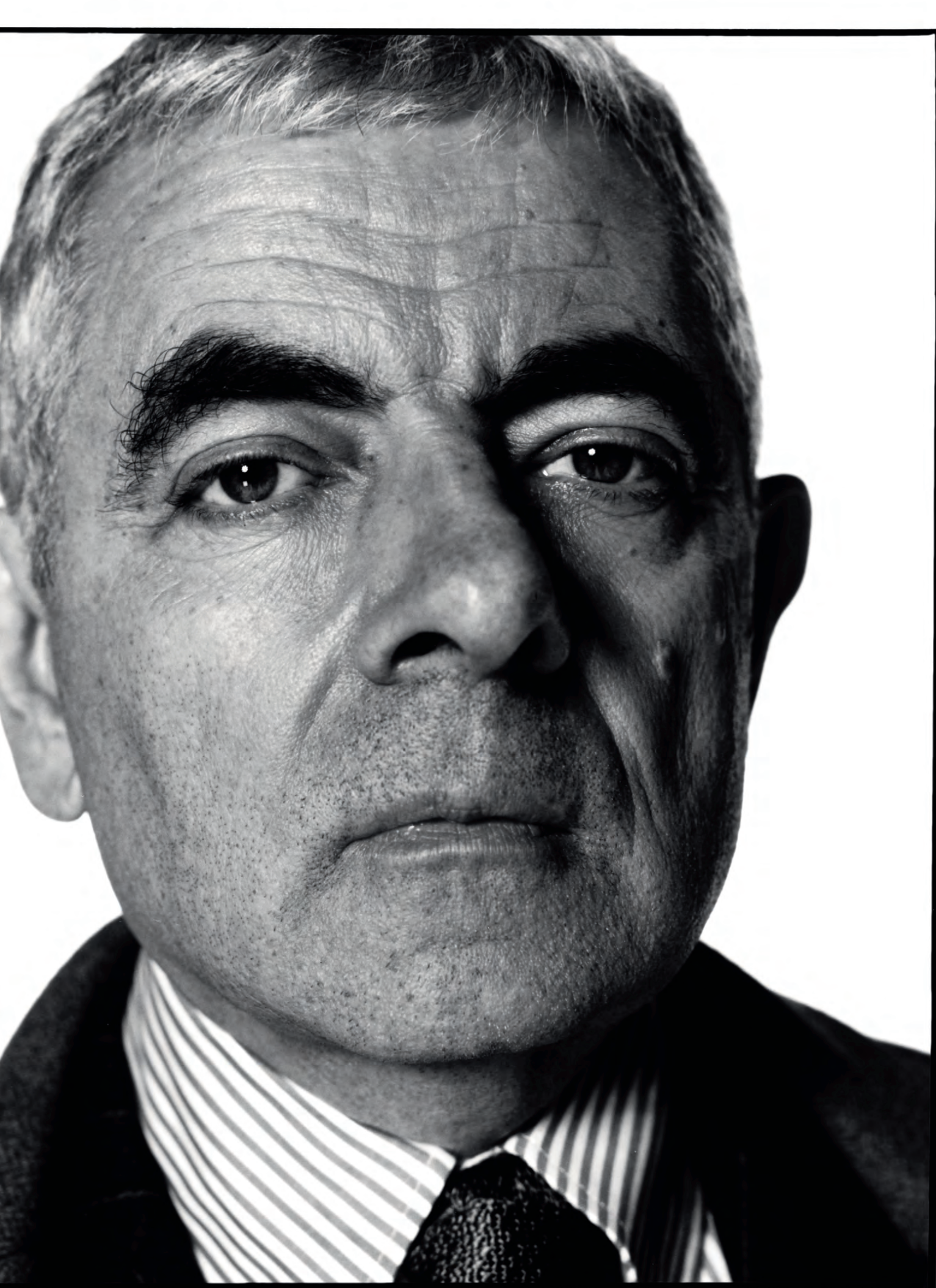
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came out to shake me by the hand and I just went like” – and he waggles his fingers with his thumb pressing his nose – “at him. I would never have dreamt of doing that as myself.

“I could only do that when I was subsumed in the character,” he says. “I would never dare to do this. It is a weirdly liberating thing to become somebody else completely and therefore have no boundaries and no qualms.” He caveats it, of course, and I feel honour-bound to include it: “Obviously I hope I would have some boundaries. But few.”

To understand Bean better, I watch an episode of *Laughing Matters*: a fake 1992 documentary in which an academic called Rowan Atkinson (MSc Oxon) explains silent comedy to the viewers with reference to a silent comedian called Kevin Bartholomew who is also played by Rowan Atkinson. He explains physical comedy as Kevin demonstrates and, at the end, he summarises him: “The physical comedian has got to be a threat to decent and respectable people,” he says. “The physical comedian is really the ultimate outlaw. He does all the things we can’t, wouldn’t and shouldn’t do in real life. The physical comedian is suffering most of the time. He is an eternal victim subject to constant hostility from all quarters. The physical comedian is indestructible. Whatever the odds against him, the comedian always survives to walk away at the end of the story.” And then Rowan Atkinson, (MSc Oxon) takes out a rifle, walks to the window, and shoots Kevin in the back. I type the text out and read it and it sounds so true I wonder if Rowan Atkinson, the actor sitting so primly before me is far closer to an anarchist than he pretends. It’s the duality again: the whisperer and the ranting man.

When I watch an episode of *Top Gear* though, in which Atkinson has finished a lap, he looks as open as a child. Cars are his “thing”. He loves them so much he puts his own cars in his films. There is a 1963 gunmetal-grey Jaguar E-type in *Man vs Bee*, a blue Aston Martin V8 Zagato in *The Tall Guy* and a red Aston Martin V8 Vantage in *Johnny English Strikes Again*. The 2006 Mini Mr Bean drives – it has an extended wheelbase and he likes it “because it is weird” – is now part of his collection, which also includes a 1952 green Jaguar Mark VII and BMW 1M coupe. He told a journalist that some of his friends think he does it all for the cars, but I don’t believe it. He is too committed to his art. Even so, “Cars are my great obsession,” he says. “I find them a very valuable escape.” It is, he says, “an extension of my love of tractors.” He held an HGV licence until he was 60 and he is still legally allowed to drive buses, though he doesn’t. He also likes mowing lawns: “It’s a bit like driving slowly.” On *Desert Island Discs* in 1989 he said he would spend his time as a castaway washing his luxury car, which is an Aston Martin: “All I want to do is clean it.”

This year, in April, Atkinson came third in a race at Goodwood Festival of Speed, which was “quite an achievement, poor as it may sound”. He gets as nervous before a race as before a

theatrical performance. He has crashed a few cars, but he says he doesn’t mind. “I’m not precious about cars. You can’t always mend a human, but you can always mend a car. You can,” he says, and he sounds genuinely happy, “mend anything.”

I ask – what’s next? “I have no particular ambitions,” he says, but he would like to write a book about cars: *My Life in Cars*. “I haven’t done any Shakespeare since I played Touchstone [the fool] in *As You Like It* directed by Richard Curtis,” – and he laughs again – “in Worcester College gardens. And that was a long time ago. I wouldn’t mind a go at something like that but yet again,” – and he still sounds happy, probably because we are close to the end – “so what if I don’t?”

I’ve spent two hours with Atkinson, and a hundred watching his work. Though I am utterly charmed by the neat, diligent, courteous man before me, I am in no way fooled by him. I’ve seen the work in its astonishing range, and I think it’s only half his self I meet: the half that protects him from the other self, the anarchist, the artist, who needs protection, or he will end up like Peter Cook. I think he is complicated – tough and vulnerable, worldly and naïve, confident yet filled with doubt – and the immaculate politesse holds these disparate parts together.

I even wonder if the cars he loves represent the very powerful emotions he seeks to master. Since he won’t tell me what his favourite music is – “Too personal,” he says, after briefly considering it – I listen to his *Desert Island Discs*, and it is splashy Chopin and suicidal Cole Porter – and choral music. I think this is the music of a romantic: once, in an unguarded moment, he told a journalist he cries “too much” and finds it “strange”. He is sensitive, and if he tends to act like a victim of himself – as Kevin the silent comedian he shot himself – that is the necessary duality of a comic actor of genius. As he told me: if there is no victim, there is no joke. I hope he does a villain next. ❧

TANYA GOLD is a freelance journalist based in Cornwall.

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“It is a weirdly liberating thing to become somebody else completely and therefore have no boundaries and no qualms.”



THE

Hollywood's new muse is the breakthrough star of *Normal People* and *Where the Crawdads Sing*. She's as surprised as you are.

**GREAT
PRETENDER**

By Anna Leszkiewicz

Photographs by Ben Parks

Styled by Nobuko Tannawa

DAISY EDGAR-JONES

and I are walking through Walthamstow Wetlands in North London, when our conversation is rudely interrupted by a goose. Standing at around two and a half feet tall, with pink legs, an orange bill, and a distinctly puffed-up chest, it walks – no, *struts* – up to us with alarming confidence, and fixes us with a very purposeful stare. We pause. “This is like, ‘You shall not pass!’” Edgar-Jones says, Gandalf-like and a little flustered. “Am I going to be attacked by a goose? Is that what’s happening?” Maybe we should try to match its confidence and barrel on past, I suggest. I begin to walk, but Edgar-Jones hangs back. The goose, perhaps sensing fear, hones in on her. She breaks out into a run, grabbing my arm as she catches up to me, then apologising for the intimate gesture. “Oh my God! I was going to [be confident], and then I panicked!” she says. “What the hell? It looked me right in the eye!”

Edgar-Jones was a relative unknown when she was cast as Marianne in *Normal People*, the thoughtfully horny BBC television adaptation of Sally Rooney’s novel about an undulating relationship unfolding between two sensitive teenagers, then young adults, in northwest Ireland. The book was widely loved, becoming an instant classic of millennial literature. The TV series was even more popular; it defined the first lockdown, and became the BBC’s most-streamed series of 2020.

We meet on a bright April afternoon, and the wetlands are both tranquil and bristling with life. Insects hum all around us, and there are geese and ducks waddling around the edge of the lakes, or gliding across the clear water, leaving V-shaped ripples fanning out behind them. Edgar-Jones arrives carrying an enormous black plastic bag under her arm. She’s just been vintage shopping, and has purchased a suede jacket that fits perfectly, but that she’s already having second thoughts about. She wears a forest-green shirt with a beaded collar, ripped jeans and a pair of brown and olive Chelsea boots that she jokingly refers to as “my fishing boots”. We’re at Walthamstow Wetlands, you see, because we’re going fishing.

We’re going fishing because Edgar-Jones is about to appear in another literary adaptation of another bestseller, Delia Owens’ part coming-of-age story, part crime thriller *Where the Crawdads Sing*. Edgar-Jones, who turned 24 in May, plays Kya, a young

woman who is abandoned as a child and grows up in total isolation, deep in the marshlands of 1950s and ’60s North Carolina. The first scene she shot was a much-loved section from the book, in which a local teenage boy named Tate leaves a feather sticking out of a tree stump outside Kya’s house, as a gift – the beginning of a long relationship between the two young adults. “I knew lovers of the book would be thinking, ‘Oh, the feather stump scene!’ I’m a big reader, and I know that feeling when you watch something like, ‘Huh. It’s not how I expected it.’”

For the part, Edgar-Jones worked with a dialect coach on the North Carolina accent. A movement coach taught her how a child who had survived barefoot in the swampy terrain would move within it as an adult. She did her own stunts, diving into alligator-infested waters, and learned how to fish with a period-specific wooden fishing rod – good practice for our activity today.

“It’s so ironic that I filmed in New Orleans and played a marsh girl,” she laughs, having just screamed as she swatted a flying beetle away. She is not a fan of bugs, flinching at the various midges, flies and wasps that occasionally interrupt us. “I thought I had become more hardy since then – but *nope*.” When it comes to fishing, she is both enthusiastic and a little apprehensive, encouraging me to go first. When our instructor, Mike from London Fishing, offers to adjust the reel handle for her (she’s left-handed), she declines, but is eventually persuaded. Once we’re talked through the specifics of technique and bait – we opt for a lurid pink ball, raspberry and peach flavour – we cast off, and Mike sets our rods on a high-tech looking rest that promises to beep at any hint of movement. From then on, it’s a waiting game.

We sit side by side in two folding chairs, looking out over the water. Joggers and children on bikes pass behind us; Edgar-Jones points out a bumblebee crawling in the grass. She explains that acting, too, is a career that requires patience, something she’s slowly getting better at. There’s the waiting to hear back after auditions, the pre-shoot quarantines during the pandemic, and the long wait for the film to come out. Actors are often “the last to see” something they’ve performed in, she says, so by the time she watches her own work, everyone else is, too. And that feeling – of being seen – is something she’s still getting used to, too.

GROWING UP IN Muswell Hill, north London, Edgar-Jones lived with her mother, Wendy, an editor on TV dramas, and her father, Philip, then the creative director of *Big Brother* (he is now the director of Sky Arts, and head of entertainment for Sky). She spent much of her childhood immersing herself in imaginary worlds alone, or closely observing the grown-ups around her. As an only child, she explains, “You learn how to behave around adults from an early age. Because you’re not sat at the kids table, you’re sat with the adults, being quiet and listening.”

Edgar-Jones started keeping a diary when she was 14. The first entry, she says, went something like this: “Hi, I’m Daisy. I have SUCH bad skin, and I don’t have a boyfriend. I like the colour green, and I love Coldplay.” She was a huge fan of Louise Rennison’s *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*, and her entries were more than a little inspired by the book’s narrator, Georgia. “I still write that way in my diary,” she laughs. Reading old entries back, she’s struck by how her tone and her “silly anxieties” have stayed the same over the last decade. “I have *not* changed.”

Acting was one of the few things that made her feel confident. “When I was a teenager, I really believed in myself when it came to performance – in a way that I wish I actually still had,” she says. “I really was like: I know what I’m doing in this arena alone. Everything else, I don’t, really.” Even as a young person, Edgar-Jones was empathetic and curious about the inner lives of others, to the extent that it could be overwhelming, particularly in social situations. “I’m so concerned about how the other person is experiencing it that I’m not actually experiencing it myself.” Acting gave her an opportunity to explore those questions in a different context. “That felt very liberating.”

At seven, she was cast as Anne Boleyn in a school play – her parents were shocked to see their well-behaved, reserved daughter excelling as a furious wife, raging at Henry VIII. They began to take her love of performance seriously. She had her first professional audition aged 15, for a role in a new adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*. The film was never made, but she met her agent as a result and over the next two years, got her first parts in the BBC sitcom *Outnumbered* and ITV’s hugely popular *Cold Feet*.

All the while, Edgar-Jones was at school excelling in her GCSEs and A-levels. She ultimately decided against drama school or university, so she could focus on auditions. “It was quite an anxious time,” she says. “I was worried that my friends would come out of

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Beautiful People





university and I wouldn't be able to hold myself in conversation with them because I'd missed out on that. I was diligently listening to podcasts, trying to find interesting things to talk about."

The next few years were the most "anxiety-making" – some small parts aside, Edgar-Jones struggled to get the roles she was going up for. Her confidence had been shaken. Then one day, alone in her North London flatshare, sitting on her bed, she got the call. She had been cast as Marianne in *Normal People*.

It's a filming experience she now has great nostalgia for. She has stayed close to her cast-mates India Mullen and Fionn O'Shea, and her co-star Paul Mescal. "He's just the best human being," she tells me. "So kind, lovely and funny."

Her first leading performance was watched by millions of people, who all seemed to be talking about it – an experience that was thrilling, and strange. "When you're an actor, you want to act in a really brave way, free of worry about that," she tells me. "The trick is not worrying – which I find so hard – if people like you or not. You're always, always looking for the bad comment. We're just wired that way." Fortunately, her cerebral and understated performance was universally praised: as Marianne, Edgar-Jones' face could hold barely concealed longing in one instant, then almost imperceptibly shift into an expression smarting from hurt. Even Edgar-Jones was happy with it. "I was really proud of the work I'd done in that show. I felt more confident in myself."

After the extraordinary global success of *Normal People*, Edgar-Jones spent the entirety of 2021 filming three projects back to back. First, *Fresh* – a slick, genre-twisting film starring her and Sebastian Stan that begins like a rom-com before taking a sudden left-turn into stomach-churning horror. Then came the springtime shoot for *Where The Crawdads Sing*. Finally, she spent the autumn filming *Under the Banner of Heaven* – a true crime thriller that explores a brutal murder in a devout Mormon community in Utah – in which Edgar-Jones plays Brenda Wright Lafferty, a young, recently married woman who was found murdered along with her infant daughter in 1984.

With *Normal People*, *Fresh* and *Crawdads*, Edgar-Jones has now appeared in a string of atmospheric, intimate, often dialogue-light projects that focus on the twists and turns, the threats and pleasures of romantic relationships. She has played a number of isolated, lonely and often prickly young women, who often have a traumatic history of abuse. These are characters who at times want to take the risk of being seen and known by others, and at other times wish to retreat into the safety of a private inner world.

The director of *Crawdads*, Olivia Newman, remembers Edgar-Jones' first audition, in which she reads aloud the names of her character's long-lost relatives. "She had me in tears," Newman says. "Everybody who watched her tape had the feeling that we were watching a movie star."

Edgar-Jones' recent projects were all directed, or co-directed, by women. *Crawdads* was executive produced by Reese Witherspoon, whose production company Hello Sunshine aims to "put women at the centre of every story." Gender doesn't factor into the actor's decision making when choosing projects. Still, seeing women behind the camera has had an effect. She recalls watching Hettie Macdonald direct her and Paul Mescal for the first time on the set of *Normal People*. The scene in question – Marianne and Connell attending a protest against the war in Gaza – didn't make the final cut, but seeing Macdonald at work struck Edgar-Jones. "I felt very moved by it," she says. "The way she commanded the space... for the first time, I went, 'God, I could do that, maybe.'"

Working with director Mimi Cave on *Fresh* was similarly instructive. "She's such a master visually because she knows how to tell a story with a camera," Edgar-Jones says. In the film, her character Noa has a weekend away with her new boyfriend Steve (Stan). To call it the world's worst date would be an understatement. (He kidnaps and drugs her, locks her in a custom-built cell in his luxury house, and tells her he plans to sell her body parts as human meat on the black market.)

Before filming, Edgar-Jones and Cave discussed how to approach the material. In an early meeting, Edgar-Jones referenced Clarissa Pinkola Estés' bestselling *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. "I was a little bit blown away, because she's so young and it's a book that's been around forever," Cave tells me. "She had this breadth of knowledge and was such a fervent reader and felt older than her years. I was like, this girl is smart as a whip, and she's going to teach me a lot." By the time filming started, Edgar-Jones had put together a file of information on her character. "She had done her own character trajectory," says Cave. "She just does her homework."

Fresh has a twisted sense of humour – in one scene, Noa bites off Steve's penis. "It was on the call sheet as 'Noa chomps Steve's dick,'" Edgar-Jones says.

Edgar-Jones says. "They used chopped-up peach and fruit for the flesh that I spit up."

Like everyone else, Sebastian Stan watched *Normal People* in lockdown, and was moved by Edgar-Jones' "authentic, complex, layered performance". He signed on to *Fresh* once he heard she was attached to the project. "That's what made me call my agent," he tells me. "Daisy has such an inherent wisdom to her, a real intelligence that she exudes quite naturally. Her coming in to play that part said to me that this character Noa is going to be a very intelligent, smart woman, and therefore Steve would have to be intelligent and smart in order to match her. That made it exciting for me."

Edgar-Jones' director recalls a scene in which her character is allowed out of her cell to dine with Steve. While he goes on a self-centred monologue about his line of work, Noa feigns interest while looking for potential exit routes.

"If you watch that scene," Cave says, "what you notice about Daisy's choices are that they're incredibly subtle. You almost can't see them, but you *feel* them: you feel that she's scared, you feel that she's disgusted, you feel like she wants to run – but she holds it so much in her body that it makes the scene sing, because the tension is so high."

Edgar-Jones describes *Fresh* as "an allegory for the commodification of women" as well as for "the disposability of dating culture – that feeling of shopping for a partner." She and Cave had long conversations about how women are taught to dismiss their deepest instincts and fears in order to be polite. "We live with an awareness of threat that is just so ingrained and normal that you don't even clock it," she says. "It's the risk factor of dating as a woman: worrying about wanting to be open to meeting someone new, but also being so aware of the risks involved in letting somebody in."

She sees the stories she's worked on as connected by their interest in the challenges and rewards of human intimacy. "I am drawn to watching relationships play out on screen and the dynamic. How different we can be

with different people, and how much a person can affect your life – be it friendship or family or romantic," she says.

In *Crawdads*, Edgar-Jones worked on a moment with her director that would communicate the growing connection between Kya and Tate. "We came up with this idea to have this moment where Kya finds a shirt of his and smells it," explains Newman. "She is missing someone and realising that she's falling in love. It's this tiny little gesture, but Daisy gives it so much emotion that you know completely what's happening in the character's mind. That came out of her instincts," she says. "She is a director's dream of an actor."

Another shared theme Edgar-Jones sees in her projects is "perception of self". Kya from *Crawdads* begins to see herself as an outsider after years of being taunted as "the marsh girl". In *Normal People*, Marianne "views herself as a very cold, unfeeling person. But she's very sensitive. It's so funny, how differently we can perceive ourselves, and how loud that inside voice can be sometimes."

WHEN EDGAR-JONES found out she'd been nominated for a Golden Globe for *Normal People*, it was her first day on the set of *Fresh*. After a two-week long quarantine in Vancouver, Canada, she was reintroduced to human contact at 4am sharp, and was feeling anxious about debuting her American accent for the role. She was sitting in makeup when she heard the news. "I was like, 'What?!'", she says. "And then I thought, God, I've got to be quite good in this now. Oh Jesus!"

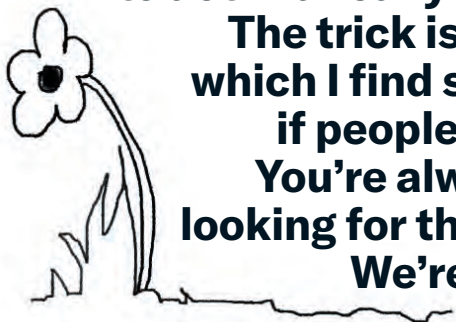
Her first scene was straightforward: her character Noa calls her friend and says she is going on a trip with her new boyfriend. But Edgar-Jones was so nervous that she repeatedly fumbled the line, her words running into each other like a multiple-vehicle pile-up. Cave was polite, but Edgar-Jones insists, "I could tell she was like, 'Oh no...'" (In the final cut of the film, Edgar-Jones is off-screen when she delivers the line.) "I was not... it was not good," she says now, looking out over the lake.

Mimi Cave remembers shooting that scene, too. "She was very self-conscious that day," she later tells me. "But she was totally in her head."

Despite earning a nomination for one of the biggest prizes in acting that very morning, Edgar-Jones began catastrophising internally. She recalls thinking, "You know, maybe this is the end of my career. But that's okay – it's been good! I'm still young, I could retrain." That night, she went home and wrote a diary entry. Those familiar anxieties came spilling out. Later, fishing her diary from her bag, she reads the entry out loud. "Today was my first day on *Fresh* and I got nominated for a Golden Globe. What the actual fuck? Filming was actually quite stressful, and I found it quite scary doing my accent. When I got home, there was no one to hug."

"Oh God," she says, blinking at the pages. "That's terribly sad!"

"When you're an actor, you want to act in a really brave way. The trick is not worrying – which I find so hard – if people like you or not. You're always, always looking for the bad comment. We're wired that way."





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“Women live with an awareness of threat that is just so ingrained and normal that you don’t even clock it”



MIKE AGREES TO watch our rods while we go for a walk. Clearly, Edgar-Jones can view herself in a harsh light. As we circle the lake, a few minutes after our encounter with the goose, the conversation returns to insecurities. “I’m terrible with self-doubt,” she tells me. She is bright and cheerful as she tells me these things, talking quickly, and frequently trailing off before she reaches the end of sentence. When was the last time she doubted herself? “Probably this morning – buying that jacket! I was like, I think I’m way cooler than I am.”

The sky has clouded over, and Edgar-Jones takes her sunglasses off; I can see her eyes for the first time. “I’m just really self-critical,” she goes on, “and it’s *boring*! I’m trying not to be that way. When do you get to the stage of just being like, ‘It is what it is’? When do you get to that point?” She sighs. “I don’t know... some people just seem to be able to do that. I’m a very needy actor, I think.” Her worry, she explains, is, “letting people down. Being the reason something is bad. Or just not doing my best.”

These tendencies are particularly heightened when filming, when Edgar-Jones becomes hyper aware of the experiences and feelings of everyone else in the room. She finds it hard to disentangle her sense of another person’s general stress from her inner conviction that she must have, in her words, “fucked it”.

On set, she doesn’t watch herself back on the monitors (“That would prang me out way too much!”) but she is used to imagining herself as viewed by another – a director, a camera, an audience. Sometimes, when she’s not on set, just going about her daily life, she finds herself thinking: did that translate to camera? She wonders if everyone does this, to some extent, even those who are never on camera. Take two people stuck in an argument, who are no longer fully invested in the fight, but keep it going, staging a drama they’ve seen a hundred times before. “You’re both acting the argument a little bit,” Edgar-Jones says. She and her friends laugh at themselves for crying, and catching themselves thinking, “I wonder if this looks... *really* good?”

As we walk back towards our fishing spot, we discuss the art critic John Berger’s theory that men look at women, while women watch themselves being looked at. A woman, Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*, is “continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is

weeping... she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.” Edgar-Jones says that men and women even look in the mirror differently, “More often than not, a man can see themselves as a whole. A woman will focus in on the tiny details, and won’t see her full face.” What does she see first when she looks in the mirror? “My moustache” she laughs, not quite finishing the word. “No, no, no, my...” she gestures to her chin and jawline. “I used to suffer from terrible bouts of acne.” Her skin, of course, is flawless now – clear, with the glow of youth. But I’m realising her perception of herself is quite different to mine. I feel like I can see her then, if only for a second. Fourteen-year-old Daisy, who likes green, Coldplay, and has SUCH bad skin.

We arrive back at our rods, where Mike is diligently keeping watch for us. “Did we catch anything?” Edgar-Jones asks, hopefully.

“Not a sausage,” he replies.

A WEEK AFTER our fishing adventure, I catch up with Edgar-Jones over a video call – she’s now in Los Angeles, talking to me from a brightly lit hotel room, wearing a white shirt and patterned trousers that she refers to as her “party pants”. She’s there to promote *Under the Banner of Heaven*, and she’s also been catching up with her friends from *Normal People* for the first time since 2019. “I just spent the whole time hysterically giggling about how exciting it was to be together,” she says.

After finding fame during a pandemic, Edgar-Jones is only just now discovering the other side of being a Hollywood actor: the junkets and photoshoots. “It’s funny because press and whatnot is very you-centric,” she says. “But it is also really fun to dress up and go to these things. And I just love dancing.”

Still, feeling all eyes on you is “a strange feeling,” she tells me. “The best actors are the ones who are quietly watching and observing, the ones who are interested in looking outwards. It is funny then, when you become recognisable. In a way, you are the observed. That’s a really odd thing.”

But Edgar-Jones does deliberately observe herself, watching all her own work back once it’s been released – multiple times. Only after repeat viewings can she be “objective” about what she’s seeing, she explains, get past the self-criticism, her memories of filming, until she can “disconnect the experience of making it” from the final product. She does it to learn

about filmmaking, because she wants to make them one day. “I don’t love watching myself at all,” she says, “but I really do ultimately want to branch out into directing.”

As a teenager, Edgar-Jones often imagined storylines for her favourite songs. She wrote out a story for Coldplay’s “Strawberry Swing”. In fact, becoming a music video director was her biggest dream, she says. “When I see Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Greta Gerwig and Olivia Wilde – all of these brilliant actors who are able to cross over,” she says, “I feel like maybe I could cross over into different sides of storytelling too, which is cool.”


In her imagined future career as Daisy Edgar-Jones the film director, she makes her debut with an adaptation of Jon McGregor’s 2002 novel *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*. “It would be an impossible film to adapt,” she says, grinning. “Impossible – because it’s so internal. But I’m just fascinated by inner life.” Until then, she hopes to explore that theme in her performances. She mentions Tilda Swinton and Frances McDormand as two of her favourite stars: like them, she wants to become a “character actor”.

“She can do anything. She could be a Marvel hero, she could be in a broad comedy,” says Cave, who believes Edgar-Jones is just getting started. “I truly think any good artist always has a shred of doubt. But that comes in combination with an inner confidence you can’t teach. It’s almost like a compass – people who really know themselves have that. Daisy, more than a lot of people, she has that compass. [During shooting], I felt I was watching someone become great.”

For all her self-criticism, Edgar-Jones still has a fundamental belief in what she does, just as she did when she was a teenager. The pull of performance, she says, lies in the strange suspension of time that she experiences mid-scene. A film set is a chaotic place, but after the cameras start rolling, everything quietsens.

“There’s a crazy...” she trails off. “I don’t know, it’s so hard to describe.” She pauses. “There’s a real moment of stillness, between action and take, that is just so thrilling. When you’re really connecting with an actor, and you’re listening to each other. It’s magical,” she says. “There’s just no better feeling.” ❖

ANNA LESZKIEWICZ is an associate editor at the New Statesman.



We know him as a legendary leading man, a Hollywood power broker, maybe the greatest heartthrob of all time. But Brad Pitt isn't attached to any of those old conceptions. And as Ottessa Moshfegh discovers, his ambitions for the rest of his life are more mystical than we could have ever imagined.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELIZAVETA PORODINA
STYLED BY JON TIETZ





BRAD PITT TRIES to remember his dreams. He keeps pen and paper on his bedside table and records everything he can recall when he wakes up in the morning. "I've found that to be really helpful," he says. "I'm curious what's going on in there when I'm not at the helm." He tells me this one recent afternoon in the brightness of his living room, at his Craftsman home in the Hollywood Hills. For a long while, his sleep had been haunted by a particularly persistent and violent dream – the particulars of which he later describes for me in an email exchange. He writes:

For a solid four or five years there, the most predominant dream I would experience would be getting jumped and stabbed. It would always be at night, in the dark, and I would be walking down a sidewalk in a park or along a boardwalk and as I'd pass under an Exorcist-like street lamp, someone would jump out of the abyss and stab me in the ribs. Or I'd notice I was being followed and then another flanked me and I realised I was trapped, and they meant me grave harm. Or being chased through a house with a kid I'd help escape but got pinned in on the deck – and stabbed. Always stabbed. And I would awake in a terror. I didn't understand why it/they would want to hurt me. This stopped a year or two ago only when I started going straight back into the dream and asking simply why?

One might be tempted to psychoanalyse a dream like that. Brad Pitt – the golden boy from Missouri who moved to California on a lark at 22 and became the biggest movie star in the world, who reportedly makes up to £15 million a film, who was twice part of perhaps the most famous relationship on the planet

– cannot go anywhere without being stalked by the paparazzi. It's easy to see how this man might feel hunted and haunted. What's perhaps surprising is how the bad dream eventually went away: only by studying this nightmare – by taking careful note of it and trying to pin down its meaning – did it begin to have less of a hold on him.

He's 58 now, nearly six years on from a difficult divorce from Angelina Jolie, with whom he has six children. We see less of him than we once did. Having receded from his position as a perennial leading man, he appears on screen a bit more sporadically these days, playing characters who feel increasingly unexpected and playfully subvert our assumptions of the kind of movie star that he's been for 30 years. He focuses a good deal of his attention on his role as a film producer, through which he's happily supporting rising auteurs and helping to shepherd the work of great authors to the screen. When we meet, he seems to me more ruminative, more intentional, more of an artist than I perhaps expected. He tells me he's trying to think carefully about what's ahead, about the path that he wants to chart for the final stages of an abundantly creative career. "I consider myself on my last leg," he says to me, "this last semester or trimester. What is this section gonna be? And how do I wanna design that?"

Mining his dreams for what meaning they might contain, he says, is a part of that process. As is plumbing his own past for

the wisdom that comes from his challenges. "Out here in California," he says, "there's a lot of talk about 'being your authentic self.' It would plague me, what does 'authentic' mean? [For me] it was getting to a place of acknowledging those deep scars that we carry."

PITT HAS A NUMBER of properties in and outside of LA – a beach house near Santa Barbara, a modernist glass-and-steel residence also in the Hollywood Hills – but it's this Craftsman home, which has been a fixture in his life throughout his tenure as a movie star, where he's been holed up for much of the pandemic. Inside, the walls are a caramel shade of cedar, and the ground floor rooms are appointed with vintage furniture and tasteful art. There are no obvious family photos on display, and no flourishes of luxury to the place, apart from the simple fineness of the home, perfect in its adherence to its early 20th-century aesthetic.

When he welcomes me, Pitt is wearing neutral tones, draped khaki trousers and a loose white T-shirt, like a man trying to camouflage himself in a wheat field. The colours call to mind the big skies of the Midwest. Pitt grew up in the Ozarks, a place he speaks about with reverie. A scented candle perfumes the kitchen where he cheerfully offers me a beverage: tea, coffee, water, juice, booze. I'm sober, like Pitt, who hasn't had a drink in almost six years. I take water, as does he.

"Cold or room temp?" he asks.

I choose cold because I want to see into his fridge: barely anything in there, just the cool bluish glare of the electric light. "All my friends have gone to room temp," he says. Room temp. That seems appropriate. The vibe here is gentle and calm.

"Is there anyone else in this house?" I ask.

"Nah," he says quickly. He has a friendly but acerbic way of answering the yes-or-no questions that, I assume, he might prefer that I not pursue. Nope. Yep.

In the fireplace, there's a barely smouldering log, and Pitt pulls up a chair as though to bask in its warmth. His eyes are clear and pale blue and they catch the light as he turns to me.

"This was the first place I bought when I made some money in '94," he says. Pitt purchased the property from Cassandra Peterson, best known for her roles on TV and in film as the campy horror host Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. She's told stories of the house being haunted when she lived here, claiming that she once heard the sound of footsteps coming from the uninhabited third floor, saw the ghost of a nurse, and of a man in period clothing sitting near the fireplace. She also claims Mark Hamill told her he lived in



OPENING PAGES
waistcoat (price upon request)

Giorgio Armani Los Angeles Collection

shirt £300
Budd Shirtmakers

trousers £300
Acne Studios

belt, stylist's own

rainbow tennis necklace (top)
£12,700

Mateo

chain necklaces (throughout), his own

bracelets (on right arm, throughout), his own

cufflink
£5,500 for pair
Fabergé



OPPOSITE PAGE
shirt £1,250
Tom Ford



jacket £3,300
trousers £2,000

Umit Benan B+

belt £970

Artemas Quibble

vintage boots
(throughout) from
Palace Costume

bracelet

(on left arm) £2,880

ring (on
left hand) £3,200

Bernard James

ring (on right hand),
his own





the house in the 1960s until his roommate hanged himself in a wardrobe. “It was really run-down and dilapidated,” Pitt tells me of his arrival. “I lived here for a few years, then I bounced around everywhere, just let friends crash here, and then somewhere in the 2000s I fixed it up. Been pretty much hiding out here.”

Lately, he’s been rising early to play his guitar, a pursuit he took up toward the beginning of the pandemic. He’ll come down here to the living room, where he’ll light a fire and strum a bit. He feels at ease here, he says, but is also happy to get out of town, often taking drives up the coast to his beach house – a trip just long enough to seem like an escape. “I drive out and I just feel like I’m taking off a cloak or something,” he says. When he’s heading back into town, he says he can feel the weight of the place. “As soon as you turn in past Santa Barbara, I feel it coming. The shoulders start getting a little higher, and I feel it. I’m not quite sure what that is and how to contend with it just yet. Other than getting out and travelling a lot.”

Of course, it’s work that often keeps him anchored to LA, and his friends tell me that he’s happiest when he’s got his head down in a project. One close confidant, Flea, the Red Hot Chili Peppers’ bassist, explains, “When Brad’s lost in the process of creating, there’s something magical about that. It’s like this thing that lights something inside a human being that gives them power and opens them up.”

Indeed, the work Pitt is doing today is gratifying in new and different ways. This year, Plan B Entertainment, his production company, is putting out *Women Talking*, an adaptation of Miriam Toews’s novel about a group of Mennonite women who unite against their rapists, directed by Sarah Polley. “It’s as profound a film as anything made this decade,” Pitt tells me. And there’s also the forthcoming film version of Joyce Carol Oates’s *Blonde*, a fictional biography of Marilyn Monroe’s interior life, directed by Andrew Dominik. Add those to a slate of other acclaimed novels Plan B has adapted or optioned – Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*, Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – and a portrait emerges of Pitt as a kind of literary kingmaker.

And yet, for all his high-mindedness as a producer and his increasing selectivity as an actor, Pitt is glad to lend his talents to the odd blockbuster when the timing is right, especially when there’s a personal connection. That includes this summer’s *Bullet Train*, directed by David Leitch, whose relationship with Pitt goes back to 1999’s *Fight Club*, when Leitch served as the star’s stunt double, a role Leitch would reprise in a number of films, including *Troy* and *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. Their filmmaking relationship took on a remarkable new vector

→
jacket £1,700
Bode
shirt £1,250
Tom Ford
trousers (part of
£1,200 suit)
Richard James
cummerbund,
vintage

when the pair began talking about *Bullet Train*, yet Leitch says their collaboration was as natural as ever. “In the conversations I had with Brad,” he says, “the number one goal was to make a movie that’s entertaining and escapist and fresh and original, that will make people want to come back to the cinema.”

Bullet Train may be a feel-good summer blockbuster, but it was filmed in part on a soundstage in LA in the middle of the pandemic. “It was heavy outside those studio gates,” co-star Brian Tyree Henry recalls. “What I remember mostly is the laughter. Brad’s laugh is really infectious. He brings this kind of ease to set where there’s nothing overworked. You’re sitting across from a masterclass of cool.”

In the film, Pitt plays Ladybug, an assassin on a train from Tokyo to Kyoto who’s just recovered from a case of burnout, returning to his high-stakes job with a somewhat misguided sense of confidence about his fitness for duty. “You know, you do a month of therapy,” Pitt says about his character, “you have one epiphany, and you think you’ve got it all figured out, and you’re never going to be forlorn ever again. That was that. I got this, I’m good to go!”

The character is a familiar type for Pitt – likeable, flawed, a little eccentric – and he plays the part with an easy charm and self-effacing humour that evokes some of his other recent roles, like Cliff Booth in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. To Quentin Tarantino, who directed Pitt in that role, as well as in *Inglourious*

Basterds, Pitt’s shape-shifting as an actor is evidence of a kind of screen presence we just don’t see much any more. “He suggests an older-style movie star,” Tarantino tells me over the phone. “He’s really good-looking. He’s also really masculine and he’s also really hip; he gets the joke. But the thing that only the directors that work with Brad and the actors that act opposite him really know, what he’s so incredibly talented at, is his ability to really understand the scene. He might not be able to articulate it, but he has an instinctive understanding about it.”

What Pitt exudes, Tarantino says, is a rare timelessness. “He’s one of the last remaining big-screen movie stars,” the director tells me, equating his star quality with that of Paul Newman, Robert Redford, and Steve McQueen. “It’s just a different breed of man. And frankly, I don’t think you can describe exactly what that is because it’s like describing starshine. I noticed it when we were doing *Inglourious Basterds*. When Brad was in the shot, I didn’t feel like I was looking through the viewfinder of the camera. I felt like I was watching a movie. Just his presence in the four walls of the frame created that impression.”

HIS HOLLYWOOD ORIGIN story is famous: he arrived in town in his Datsun, having left the University of Missouri two credits short of his degree. He’d been studying journalism, hoping to one day become an art director, and though those vague aspirations quickly faded, certain proclivities remained. He’s always loved to make things, hold things, feel their quality and texture. It’s a passion he first developed in his

“He’s one of the last remaining big-screen movie stars. It’s just a different breed of man. And frankly, I don’t think you can describe exactly what that is because it’s like describing starshine.”

—QUENTIN TARANTINO







THESE PAGES
jacket £2,080
Saint Laurent by
Anthony Vaccarello
shirt £300
Budd Shirtmakers
skirt £1,620
Thom Browne
boots and
ring, his own
bracelet £2,880
Bernard James

junior high shop class, and, he tells me, one that defines him still.

"I'm one of those creatures that speaks through art," Pitt explains. "I just want to always make. If I'm not making, I'm dying in some way." Of course, Pitt has also made more than merely movies: sculpture, furniture, homes. As his friend Spike Jonze, the filmmaker, recalls, sometimes Pitt makes music too: "The other day he came over obsessing over the song 'Unconditional I (Lookout Kid)' that Arcade Fire released two days earlier, and we sat and listened to it and played guitar and sang along to it a dozen times just to get to experience it inside out. I could feel the song spilling out of him."

As we're talking in his living room, Pitt slips away for a moment and then reappears, looming over the couch on which I sit. He slaps two incredibly heavy candlesticks into my open palms. I understand that these are his creations. Over the pandemic, he learned ceramics. The candlesticks are painted black and gold and are very handsome. "That's porcelain," he says. "Everything I read, porcelain's about being thin so that light penetrates, the thinner you get. It's a cardinal sin to make it thick." And yet that's what Pitt has done, and he's succeeded. "What I love is the heft, like a Leica camera or a quality watch. You could dump this in the dirt and someone could dig it up 2,000 years later, because it's been under a volcanic reaction."

Perhaps the most renowned of Pitt's creative sidelines is the wine that he's been producing at his estate in Provence, Château Miraval. In 2008, he and Jolie bought the thousand-acre property, which produces a world-class rosé that has become a multimillion-pound business; in 2014 the two were married there. More recently, the estate popped up in the press when Jolie sold her stake in the business. Amid the legal wrangling that followed, Pitt received an interesting bit of information about the property.

Pitt tells me that he was approached a few years ago by a man who explained to him that the château was supposedly home to another fortune: millions of pounds' worth of gold that one of the estate's medieval owners had taken from the Levant during the Crusades and buried on the grounds. "I got obsessed," Pitt says. "Like for a year, this was all I could think about, just the excitement of it all." He bought radar equipment and scoured his property. "Maybe it has something to do with where I grew up, because in the Ozark Mountains there were always stories of hidden caches of gold."

Of course, no treasure was unearthed. Pitt says the man who'd approached him was ultimately seeking money for some kind of radar company; an investment opportunity, he was told. The whole thing went nowhere and Pitt was left feeling a little surprised that he'd let himself believe in the idea. The entire experience was, he says, "pretty foolish in the end. It was just the hunt that was exciting."

As he finishes this story, Pitt offers me a nicotine mint. He chews them mindlessly. He explains that he quit smoking during the pandemic. He realised that simply cutting back on cigarettes wasn't going to suffice – he had to cut them out. "I don't have that ability to do just one or two a day," he says. "It's not in my makeup. I'm all in. And I'm going to drive into the ground. I've lost my privileges."

It's one of several radical changes he's made to his health over the past few years. After Jolie filed for divorce, in 2016, he got sober and spent a year and a half attending Alcoholics Anonymous. "I had a really cool men's group that was really private and selective, so it was safe," he says. "Because I'd seen things of other people, like Philip Seymour Hoffman, who had been recorded while they were spilling their guts, and that's just atrocious to me."

When Pitt talks about the past, he's got a Buddhist style of detachment, a calm kind of self-inquiry. He's also very willing to admit the appeal of his old vices, thinking back to the days when he'd have a cigarette "in the morning, with the coffee – just delicious." In Pitt's mind there are certain people who can do that all their life and get away with it. Indestructible types like the artist David Hockney. Pitt has met him on a couple of occasions. "He's still chain-smoking, the hardcore English way. It looks great." Pitt smiles ruefully. "I don't think I have that. I'm just at that age when nothing good comes from it."

PITT HAS TALKED before about a curious problem he has in social settings, especially at parties. He struggles to remember new people, to recognise their faces, and he fears it's led to a certain impression of him: that he's remote and aloof, inaccessible, self-absorbed. But the truth is, he wants to remember the people he meets and he's ashamed that he can't. He's never been officially

diagnosed but thinks he may suffer from a specific condition: prosopagnosia, an inability to recognise people's faces that's otherwise known as face blindness.

When I tell him that my husband seems to suffer from this as well, Pitt goes wild. "Nobody believes me!" he cries. "I wanna meet another." He's making uncannily good eye contact as he says this, and it's at this point that I realise that Brad Pitt is definitely not aloof or reserved. The truth is, sitting with him is an altogether different experience. He's affable and charming in all the ways you might hope, but his charisma goes deeper: this is a man who seems deeply committed to forging meaningful connections, to probing life's existential quandaries and hearing your personal stories. He's the opposite of a guy who'd snub you at a party. He's the guy who wants to see your soul.

He's also a guy who, hidden under his shirt, has a line from a Rumi poem inked across his right bicep: "There exists a field, beyond all notions of right and wrong. I will meet you there." It's a deeply romantic idea, but does it also hint at a certain solitude? "I always felt very alone in my life," he explains, "alone growing up as a kid, alone even out here, and it's really not until recently that I have had a greater embrace of my friends and family. What's that line, it was either Rilke or Einstein, believe it or not, but it was something about when you can walk with the paradox, when you carry real pain and real joy simultaneously, this is maturity, this is growth."

Then he turns his lens on me. "I wanted to ask you," he says, "why the fuck are we here? What's beyond? Because I gather that you believe in something beyond... do you feel trapped here, in this body and in this environment?"

In response, I recite another Rumi poem: "I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary... I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that

"I'm one of those creatures that speaks through art. I just want to always make. If I'm not making, I'm dying in some way."

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shirt £265
trousers £1,300
tie (price
upon request)
Collina Strada
bracelets, his own
ring (on middle finger)
£3,200
Bernard James
ring (on little finger)
£4,870
Fabergé





shirt £420
ERL
trousers £930
Versace
braces,
stylist's own



way. Whoever brought me here will have to take me home."

Insane to think I am quoting a 13th-century Persian poet to a movie star in LA in 2022, but I think it goes over well. I tell him that my so-called aviary isn't too bad; I'm lucky. "But while I'm here on earth," I say, "I'm a bit hypersensitive to things. Like music."

"What is that about?" Pitt asks. "Because music fills me with so much joy. I think joy's been a newer discovery, later in life. I was always moving with the currents, drifting in a way, and onto the next. I think I spent years with a low-grade depression, and it's not until coming to terms with that, trying to embrace all sides of self – the beauty and the ugly – that I've been able to catch those moments of joy."

"My heart just might be broken," I tell him. "So when I feel things, when my heart is activated, it hurts."

"I think all our hearts are broken," he says. There's a bit of dad in his voice. It sounds like sincere care and wisdom, as if I'm talking to a guy on a long-distance train ride who is curious and kind and has all the time in the world to let me try to say what I mean.

He's always on a quest for meaning, he tells me. By way of explanation, he brings up a poem by Rilke. "He's describing this bust of Apollo, and he's talking about the craftsmanship, and then suddenly out of nowhere is this line, 'You must change your life.' You know it? Oh, it gives me chills."

Pitt polishes off his bottle of water and looks past me, seemingly lost in thought. Silence is especially dramatic when Brad Pitt is creating it.

Suddenly, he's scrolling through photos on his iPhone. The bust of Apollo made him think about the LA-based artist Charles Ray, perhaps the most influential sculptor working

today and, it turns out, a mutual acquaintance of ours. Pitt tells me he recently saw an exhibition of Ray's work at the Pinault Collection in Paris. "He made this Christ out of paper," Pitt says, showing me a photo on his phone. "And the way the light catches it is something unbelievable. Also, it's not on the wall and it's not on the cross, although he's crucified. He's floating, it's like he's free of it, it's just so stunning. See how it floats, and the shadow on the wall?"

The paper Christ that Pitt is talking about is a study after 17th-century Italian sculptor Alessandro Algardi's *Corpus Christi*, which was originally cast in silver for Pope Innocent X. Ray created the Christ form by moulding wet paper pulp, and considers the piece to be a kind of drawing rather than a sculpture. Pitt zooms in on details to show me the beauty of the work. "See the way the light bounces off it? It's still got the movement of the wind, and the nail holes are there. Just beautiful..."

Later, Ray explains to me his ambitions for the sculpture: "I thought that if I extended the structure of what paper could actually do and push its material structure and scale to a limit where it could barely hold together, then I might find divinity in my endeavour." Like Ray, Pitt seems interested in finding something sacred in the making of things. But he hesitates to call himself an artist. His personal pursuit of ceramics isn't an art form, he tells me, but a "solo, very quiet, very tactile kind of sport." I think this is his Ozarkian humility coming through. He's obviously an artist – he lives like one, works like one, ruminates like one, suffers and aspires like one – and thinks deeply about what it means to be one. "Art is

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suit £1,200
Richard James
shirt £330
Dries Van Noten
tie £180
Hermès
ring (on middle finger)
£3,200
Bernard James
ring (on little finger)
£4,870
Fabergé

something inexplicable," he says. "Art is something that gives you goosebumps, that makes the hairs stand up on the back of your neck, that brings a tear to the eye. Maybe it's because someone understood before you, you're not alone."

A FEW DAYS after we meet at his house, Pitt sends me an email – composed, he tells me, just after six-hour oral surgery – in which he elaborates on the answers he gave in our interview. The email is

broken down into three categories: summation, clarification, rumination. And he explains, as if to a friend, something he has learned about effective communication in a relationship, emphasising that a healthy self begins with taking "radical accountability."

Is Brad Pitt psychic, I wonder, or is it obvious that I need advice in this area? Earlier in the day, my husband confronted me about this very issue of accountability, claiming that I deflect critical feedback as though I'm made of glass. I'm afraid to see myself clearly sometimes, it's true. Then I remember Pitt's comforting half-smile. "All our hearts are broken," he said.

I also think back to Pitt's dreams about stalkers coming out of the darkness to stab him, and about how he learned to control those dreams by simply asking "Why?" That inquisitive side of him has come into clearer focus now, his need to excavate life's most complex truths. I write back, asking what he interprets these dreams to mean. A few days later, he offers this explanation:

My interpretation of the stabbing dreams were on the surface about fears, feeling unsafe, completely alone – but beneath it all they mostly seemed to be about buried needs – those aspects of self that weren't allowed to bloom as a child – like healthy anger, individuality, or especially a voice.

It takes courage to foray back into a nightmare and unearth the pains of one's childhood, and to name them. And it takes skill to simultaneously stand in the place of both your ghost and your killer in order to play out the drama between them. There's something useful in Pitt's example here – his ability to be two things at once, his willingness to carry the paradox of being human.

When Pitt and I were sitting by the fire, he said something profound: "I am a murderer. I'm a lover. I have the capacity for great empathy and I can devolve into pettiness." One might say that in dreams we can be anyone, feel anything, go anywhere. We are like actors in a movie of our own making, and we watch the film alone at night, in the dark. If we truly want to understand ourselves, we ought to take notes. ❖

OTTESSA MOSHFEGH is the author of six books, including the newly-published *Lapvona*.

"I always felt very alone in my life. Alone growing up as a kid, alone even out here and it's really not until recently I have had a greater embrace of my friends and family."





The Mystery of the

Dutch artist Jeroen van der Most got the shock of his life when he stumbled across a story about one of his paintings selling for £2.5 million. But as he hadn't painted it, he needed to find out exactly what was going on...

DIRIYAH STARRY NIGHT

By
Will Coldwell

Photographs by
Fredrik Altinell

A lot of artists are introverted and not good at selling themselves. Jeroen van der Most is the opposite.





WHEN THE SUN rose on 2 July 2021, Jeroen van der Most made the short walk from the bedroom of his Amsterdam apartment to the study in which he works, opened a new browser window, and did what he does every morning: Googled his own name.

It's an "awful habit," Van der Most told me recently, and one that did not usually bear fruit. Occasionally, he'd see that a conference he was speaking at had received some coverage, or better still, that his work had been written about in a newspaper. Van der Most is a digital artist; his brushes and paint are AI and algorithms. Although not yet a household name, his profile has been growing in recent years. He is regularly invited to speak at digital art conferences, and a number of his projects have generated attention in the mainstream press.

For one, Van der Most used software to create a 'future' work by Vincent Van Gogh. He designed an algorithm to analyse 129 existing Van Gogh paintings, from which he hand-painted the 'new' work – an expressionist landscape featuring a barn on an horizon, undulating hills and a single white flower in the foreground. In another, Van der Most fused AI-based imagery with fragments of paintings by the Old Masters. The result, *Garden of Aiden*, now hangs above his computer. In it, figures and animals interact amid hazy layers drenched in soft hues and imperceptible brush strokes.

Van der Most typed his name into the search bar and hit enter. There, under the news tab, was a story he hadn't seen before, published in the *Saudi Gazette*. The article's photo caught Van der Most's eye. It was of a painting in a gold frame, held by white-gloved hands, as you might see in an auction house. The painting contained the swirling sky of Van Gogh's iconic *Starry Night*: deep blues entwined with the bright yellow light of the stars and moon, all shimmering with the vibrations of the cosmos. Only in this artwork, the starry night shone not over the landscape that Van Gogh had conjured in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1889. In this version, the sky twinkled over the mud-walled ruins of the city of Diriyah, the birthplace of the Saudi state.

"*Diriyah Starry Night* painting showcases cultural depth of Saudi Arabia," the headline declared. It was, the article explained, "one of the most valuable pieces of art inspired by the work of Van Gogh." The painting had been sold not once, but twice: first in 2018, when a businessman from Saudi Arabia paid £2 million for the artwork before it was even finished. Then, when it arrived in Riyadh, a Saudi businesswoman had bought it again, for £2.5 million. The artist? One Jeroen van der Most, described as Van Gogh's "compatriot" and an accomplice of the Instituut Van Gogh.

According to the report, Van der Most had found inspiration during a visit to Diriyah. Peering through the window of a mud house, the artist recalled the story of Van Gogh's work and was compelled to start drawing Diriyah "in a sky full of stars". The result, the artist was quoted as saying, was an artwork "between what I saw and what Van Gogh saw in a different place and time."

The real Van der Most was astonished. He'd never been to Saudi Arabia. He hadn't created the *Diriyah Starry Night*. He had definitely not been paid £2.5 million for it. But what made his spine tingle was that he was the sort of artist that *could* have.

Van der Most wallows in an art-history uncanny valley. He reaches into the past to create familiar, yet unknown images. Classic works, hacked and spliced using computers and code. He had even used Van Gogh's *Starry Night* as a basis for a previous work,

an homage to the partially destroyed Christchurch cathedral in New Zealand, constructed using tweets about the 2011 earthquake. Was the story a mistake? Clickbait? A scam?

A few days later, Van der Most was tagged on Twitter by the Dutch Embassy in Saudi Arabia, which proudly shared the *Gazette* story. "Have you seen this painting in real life?" Van der Most replied. He sent the embassy a LinkedIn post he had written about his confusion. The embassy said they would look into it. Janet Alberda, the Dutch ambassador to Saudi Arabia, paid a visit in person to the *Saudi Gazette* and the article was quickly updated, removing all reference to Van der Most. "The writer of the article was not aware that the painting did not exist," Alberda told me over email.

But *did* the painting exist? Van der Most still couldn't say. He contacted a Dutch journalist, Lex Boon, to help him with his inquiry. One night, scrolling through Instagram photos tagged #diriyah, Boon found a post of the very same photograph of the *Diriyah Starry Night*. The photographer, Nouf Yarub knew nothing about its origins, but could confirm that there was, in fact, a painting. She was happy to share the contact details of the client who had commissioned the shoot. His name was Dr Meshal Al-Hararani.

Al-Hararani is in his early 30s, fresh-faced with smooth skin and a warm smile. Beneath his *ghutra* he sports glasses and a neatly trimmed beard. An inventor and adviser at King Abdulaziz University, he has been described, by the *Saudi Gazette*, as "the next Thomas Edison". He counts a number of unusual inventions to his name. One is a digital version of the Quran for blind people. Another is a serrated needle designed for cartilage surgery. More recently, he was part of a team designing road bumps that generate electricity from vehicles. The concept was part of the development of NEOM, a £420 billion 'smart city' being built in Saudi Arabia. Al-Hararani has described it as a "city for dreamers".

Boon, the Dutch journalist, who has a cheerful demeanour and a nose for oddball stories, struck up a correspondence with Al-Hararani. According to Boon, over WhatsApp, Al-Hararani explained he was managing communications about the painting, which was owned by a friend of his. A princess. Al-Hararani said that the artist was a Dutch man named "Jeroen" – perhaps not Van der Most after all. As if to smooth things over, Al-Hararani said the princess wanted to send Boon a gift. Weeks later, a picture frame – glass smashed – arrived, containing a black and white photo of Diriyah. In return, Van der Most sent Al-Hararani an AI-based artwork of a bunch of flowers, *Arabian Bloom*. It was never collected from the depot; a month later it arrived back in the Netherlands. Al-Hararani had seemed interested in Boon writing an article about the painting, but when it became apparent this was not going to happen immediately, the conversation trailed off – until, some months later, when Van der Most received an invitation to speak at a conference in Saudi Arabia.

On 31 October 2021, Van der Most flew to Jeddah, with Boon in tow. As he stepped off the plane, the hot, dry air transported him back to his childhood living in Oman, where his father worked for an oil company. "We had no real plans," said Van der Most. "Or any idea whether we would hear from Meshal." But soon after their arrival, the pair were swept up in a gleaming Cadillac and taken to meet Al-Hararani at his office.

Al-Hararani seemed pleased to see them. As Van der Most recounts, over dinner, Al-Hararani, dressed in a white *thobe*, told them what he knew about the painting: there was a Saudi princess who loved Van Gogh, and loved Diriyah. The idea of the *Diriyah Starry Night* was mooted by a group of her acquaintances; the princess was smitten. She put up

£2.5 million (an astonishing sum for a new commission from an unknown artist) to bring it to life. The money was to cover its creation, marketing, a display in her home and – she hoped – a place in a museum.

And now, Van der Most told me, Al-Harasani suggested that the *Saudi Gazette* article had mistakenly slipped into the press before the painting's debut. Before that, the artist was only known as "Jeroen". The implication was that perhaps someone at the newspaper had Googled the name and erroneously added Van der Most's surname. Despite the confusion, Al-Harasani seemed pleased to see Van der Most. When Van der Most asked if he could see the painting for himself, Al-Harasani agreed. The painting was in Diriyah with the princess, he said, but he would arrange for it to be driven over to Jeddah for their inspection. According to Van der Most, when he asked, half-jokingly, if he could sign the *Diriyah Starry Night*, Al-Harasani's response was calm and considered: "Yes please."

Van der Most nodded along, playing it cool. But, as he told me, he was "exploding" inside. "I was like, what the fuck is this? Is he bullshitting? Is this actually going to happen?"

The following evening, Van der Most told me, he and Boon arrived at Al-Harasani's villa. After a long dinner, they were finally invited to a room upstairs. There was a large black suitcase on the floor. The case was a nice touch, Van der Most thought, as he unclipped the gold catches and lifted the lid. The painting he had travelled across the world to see lay there, resplendent. The deep blues and swirling colours filled the room. The physicality of the work was finally apparent, the grooves of the brush strokes and the crests and valleys of the thick oil paint. The *Diriyah Starry Night* glowed.

Van der Most broke his gaze from the painting and took a breath: "So can I sign?" "It's yours," said Al-Harasani.

Van der Most crouched by the case, took out a brush and, in the bottom left corner of a multimillion-pound artwork he didn't make, slowly marked out four letters in black paint: MOST. Al-Harasani remained relaxed. Van der Most stood up. He couldn't quite believe his eyes. The fake *Diriyah Starry Night* was now his; the *Saudi Gazette* report made real. Van der Most had an artwork, and Al-Harasani, it seemed, had an artist.

Van der Most's plan was coming together as he'd hoped. Because what Al-Harasani didn't know was that back in the Netherlands, Van der Most already had a copy of the *Diriyah Starry Night*, hidden out of sight. And he was figuring out what to do with it.

IN LATE MARCH, an Arctic wind flecked with snow whipped down Binnen Oranjestraat in the centre of Amsterdam. The narrow street is like many others in the city: tightly pressed red-brick houses, bars and cafes, and a gentle flow of two-wheeled



**I was like, what the fuck is this?
Is he bullshitting?
Is this actually going to happen?**



The *Diriyah Starry Night*, held carefully by white-gloved hands. The photographer knew nothing about the painting's origins.

traffic, but that night it was darker and quieter than usual. One shopfront was the exception. Despite the blinds being rolled down and the door firmly closed, a purple light beamed from behind the window, expelling an eerie neon glow.

I knocked on the door and Van der Most opened it. He handed me a flute of Saudi champagne, a non-alcoholic alternative to the traditional fizz, and beckoned me inside. The venue was OpenSpace, a crypto art gallery that opened this year. Digital displays hung on the walls, showcasing photos of the *Diriyah* as well as snaps from Van der Most's trip to Saudi Arabia: a street in Riyadh, a truck loaded with camels.

I took a seat among a small group of people who had gathered at the behest of the artist. Boon was there, as well as a pair of TV producers. Sander Duivestuin, a tech analyst and the co-author of the book *Real Fake*, sat in front of me. Then there was Maarten Smakman, a "blockchain explorer" and Oliver, the gallery's owner, who doesn't share his surname. ("He's deep into crypto," Van der Most said.)

Van der Most explained that he planned to mint and sell a series of NFTs of the *Diriyah Starry Night*. NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, grew out of the world of cryptocurrency, and have quickly emerged as a way to authenticate digital objects online, generating a rabid new market (or a bubble, depending on who you ask) for everything from memes to fine art. In the art world, where authenticity and authorship are key components of value, NFTs have provided a semblance of certainty within the slippery confines of the internet. Last year, the artist Mike Winkelmann, known as Beeple, sold an NFT at Christie's for £55 million. The NFT collective Bored Ape Yacht Club, which sells profile pictures of cartoon apes, and has inspired everything from branded craft ale to animated YouTube series, is valued at more than £3 billion.

Smakman and Oliver were helping Van der Most develop a bigger investment structure around the *Diriyah* by setting up a DAO, or a decentralised autonomous organisation, a way to build a shareholder-style collective using the blockchain. Anyone who buys an NFT of the *Diriyah* would gain membership; the money raised would fund further artistic projects, investigations and media around the painting, keeping a two-way dialogue between the artist and his patrons. It presented a way to sell the story – and the ongoing narrative – rather than a single piece of art. To Smakman it presented a "new model for storytelling". Oliver, the gallerist, talked to me excitedly about the role of the "puppetmaster".

It reminded me of Marcel Duchamp's *Monte Carlo Bonds*. In 1924, Duchamp designed and sold legal documents to those who wanted to invest in his roulette strategy and collect dividends from the profits. It blurred the lines between investor and patron, art and business. Was the art piece the beautifully designed bond document? The chance to be a part of Duchamp's dice-rolling escapade? Or a cynical money-making scheme?

Van der Most, who was wearing his uniform of black Adidas tracksuit and white Stan Smith trainers, took to the front of the room. Using a slideshow, he pitched the story of the *Diriyah Starry Night*. "I initially thought I'd get a lawyer," he said, recounting the moment he stumbled across the artwork. "Then I thought, no, this is insanely good. This is gold..." The audience laughed. Van der Most has a mischievous demeanour that is both charming and enticing. Soon after he encountered the *Saudi Gazette* story, he explained, he found an agency based in Bulgaria that would hand-paint a copy of the *Diriyah* from a photo. Van der Most paid £700 for it. Six weeks later, the artwork arrived. The postage stamps were from China. From start to finish, the process was as fake as you can get. To Van der Most, it was perfect.

"Where is it now?" someone asked. "In the Netherlands," Van der Most replied, somewhat cryptically. I'd expected him to unveil the painting that evening, but he seemed to be keeping his cards close to his chest – or waiting for the perfect moment.

"It should be in the Van Gogh museum," said one woman.

"This should be a Hollywood blockbuster," said another.

"If you make an NFT from it," said Duivestuin, "I'd buy one."

Van der Most laughed. He's thought of all these ideas already. The more time I spent with him, the more I realised that he was thinking about ways to capitalise on the *Diriyah* all the time. "Well that's what we're here today for," he said. "To consider what to do next." Then he posed a question that everyone in the room was now pondering about his replica: "Could the real, fake *Diriyah Starry Night* end up being worth even more than £2.5 million?"

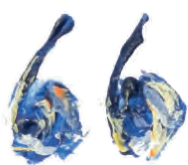
THE FOLLOWING MORNING, I waited for Van der Most outside his Amsterdam apartment block. In my pocket I thumbed a velvet bag containing a vial of sand that Van der Most had pressed into my hands the previous evening. He told me he had collected it in Saudi Arabia. I wondered if the totem represented something real to cling to, or whether it was simply more theatre. It reminded me of the spinning top in *Inception*.

Van der Most's apartment was a modern and minimal space: contemporary furniture, lots of light. Before he became an artist, Van der Most worked in market research and analytics. But he had always made art, and had an affinity for the Old Masters. He remembers visiting Amsterdam aged six and visiting the Rijksmuseum. I asked if any painting stuck with him: "I think [Rembrandt's] *The Jewish Bride*," he said, "But I might be dreaming it."

He led me to his study. It was dimly lit and the blinds were closed. On the side of his desk was a perspex block containing an image of the *Diriyah Starry Night*, with a mock NFT code printed on the back. He'd been experimenting with ways to package the artwork, objects he could send out to investors. "It's not quite right yet," he said, turning the block over in his hand. He flicked open his computer, to show me another experiment he was running. He seemed invigorated by last night's event. One person had bought the domain name *diriyah-starry-night.com*. He liked this. He was interested in how people might respond, and participate.

A browser window popped up and I spotted his name in the Google search bar. Van der Most chuckled. He clicked onto a design program and a 3D graphic of the *Diriyah* floated on the screen. An animated shooting star smashed the painting into smithereens – retro computer-game style. Then, text emerged: "Beauty was everywhere, even in the sand." Another shooting star, another smash: "Once upon a time in the blistering heat of the desert..." And again: "My name is Aya and I am a criminal..."

Van der Most had set up a text generator and input fragments from the story Boon had written about their trip to Saudi Arabia for the Dutch newspaper *Het Parool*, along with snippets of text about Saudi Arabia and China. He imagined these AI-generated fragments as beginnings for new stories. "My name is Aya and I am a criminal... how cool



Perhaps the real, fake *Diriyah Starry Night* could end up being worth even more than \$3.2 million.





is that?!” Van der Most laughed. “I didn’t input that, it’s just an algorithm coming up with stuff.”

It echoed a recent art project Van der Most had produced with Peter van der Putten, called *Letters from Nature*. The pair used AI to write letters to world leaders about climate change on behalf of ice caps, glaciers and coral reefs. Van der Putten, an assistant professor at Leiden University, got to know Van der Most through Amsterdam’s coding community. “When you work with AI, it sometimes takes you somewhere you don’t expect it to go,” Van der Putten told me. “Jeroen doesn’t mind giving up some of the control of his art projects to something else.” Van der Most’s latest project was “almost co-created,” he added, “only not between a human and AI, but between him and a bunch of Saudis.”

Sabine Winters, the founder of Future Based, an interdisciplinary philosophy website, told me that the narrative Van der Most was building around the painting was a “window into his craftsmanship. I think Jeroen is a very strategic thinker, as well as an artist,” she said. “A lot of artists I work with are introverted and not good at selling themselves. But Jeroen is the opposite. He is always thinking ahead and of his audience.”

A thought had nagged me since I first spoke to Van der Most: it all felt a bit too convenient for an artist who interrogates notions of authorship and value to stumble into a caper like this. There was clearly potential for him to profit out of the *Diriyah*. In one of our earlier conversations, I had asked Van der Most what he wanted from the affair. “A Netflix documentary!” he said. I couldn’t help but question my role in the meta-narrative Van der Most was creating. It was Van der Most who had first contacted me about his story, after reading an article I’d written for *Wired* about an alternate reality game which blended real life with a fictional online world. Naturally,

I was intrigued. But the more time I had spent with it, the more confused – and compromised – I felt. Who was I serving? Was I telling his story, or was I a participant in it? Van der Putten told me my hand-wringing reminded him of the “observer effect” in quantum physics, in which the moment a particle is observed, it alters its state. “Whether you like it or not, you’re going to become part of the story,” he said. I didn’t know whether to feel reassured.

Van der Most was still talking about algorithms when I stopped him mid-flow. “I have to ask,” I said. “Have you set this whole thing up?”

He went silent. Then laughed loudly. “No!” There was an awkward pause. “But wouldn’t it be fantastic if I had?”

SINCE VAN DER MOST first contacted me, I had pursued every lead I could think of to resolve the unanswered questions about the *Diriyah Starry Night*. In fairness, it would have taken great skill for Van der Most to construct the whole affair. “It would just be unimaginably difficult,” he told me. “From the late-night conversations with the inventor right down to the difficulty getting a visa to Saudi Arabia... it would be nearly impossible to do.” Boon, who travelled with Van der Most, agreed that it was too random and complex to imagine it was a setup. Van der Putten and Duivestein, who knew Van der Most well, said they had no doubt his story was true. Smakman and Oliver told me it didn’t really matter either way.

“So it’s a big, crazy coincidence?” I asked Van der Most.

“Well, I don’t know if it’s a complete coincidence,” he said. He’s still unsure how his name got tangled up in all this. He wonders about one gallerist who had connections in the region. (The gallerist declined to talk to me.) Or perhaps Al-Harasan encountered Van der Most’s work during a trip to the Netherlands; his work has hung in hotels in the city.

But if not Van der Most, then who had painted the *Diriyah*? There are 52,000 Jeroens in the Netherlands. And what of the princess? Saudi Arabia boasts thousands. Had one of them really been tricked into paying £2.5 million for what was, in essence, a cheap fake? In recent years, the Saudi government has spent millions of dollars on art to reposition the country as a cultural capital. The crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, even paid £360 million for Leonardo da Vinci’s *Salvator Mundi* (and there are claims even that might be fake). But with the *Diriyah Starry Night*, there was no way of knowing whether any money had changed hands at all. I followed up with the writer at the *Saudi Gazette*, Anas Alyusuf, who directed me to speak to Al-Harasan and offered no further clues.



Van der Most is “holding out for the right moment” to sign the real, fake *Diriyah Starry Night*, made in China for £700.

Océane Pouélé, a curator at Artelier, an art consultancy that works with luxury hotels and wealthy clients (and, I imagined, potentially the odd princess), told me it was “extremely unusual” that there would be so much secrecy over the artist’s name. “Particularly in investment-grade art,” she said, “the name is everything.” Along with the bespoke nature of the artwork, it strongly suggested that the painting was made by a company or artist who specialised in copies and didn’t want to – or couldn’t – put their name to the work. “Revealing this would mean that the £2.5 million could not be justified, so the work would essentially lose prestige or mystery,” she said.

Pouélé told me that it was likely the painting was made in the Netherlands. Artelier had done a lot of research into Saudi Arabian artists and never encountered anyone working in that style of oil painting. “It makes sense that if they were after a Van Gogh aesthetic, they would seek out an artist in the Netherlands,” she said. “Perhaps someone who specialises in copies of Van Goghs. The name Jeroen seems important.”

I contacted a number of companies that specialise in Van Gogh copies. Erik van der Velde, the founder of Van Gogh Studios, described his company as the high end of the market. He works with artists in the Netherlands, as well as Belgium and Italy and beyond. It can knock you up a *Starry Night* for £400. The premium collection is produced by the master forger Geert Jan Jansen, who was arrested in 1994 and spent a year in jail in 2000. If you want to splash out, a Jansen copy of *The Red Vineyard* is yours for £12,000. The *Diriyah Starry Night* was certainly an artwork they could have produced, Van der Velde told me, but not this time. “People have requested their face on a Rembrandt, of their dog in the Van Gogh style,” he said. “You get all sorts of requests.” I asked if any of his artists were called Jeroen.

“Yes, actually,” he said. I almost spat out my tea.

“But I’m 100 per cent sure the Jeroen who works for me did not make this painting,” he said. “My artists exclusively work for me and all sales go through me.”

I asked if I could speak to this Jeroen myself. Van der Velde said no. He was very protective over the identity of his artists, but agreed to pass on my number. I have yet to hear back.

The Instituut Van Gogh, which preserves the memory of Van Gogh at the artist’s last residence in Auvers-sur-Oise, France, was mentioned in the original *Saudi Gazette* article. Its president, Dominique-Charles Janssens, was surprised to learn this. The only Jeroen he was acquainted with was Jeroen Krabbé, a well-known Dutch actor and accomplished painter who also presented a documentary series about Van Gogh (you probably know him as the villain in the Bond film *The Living Daylights*). Surely it couldn’t be him – it seemed very unlikely, and was certainly one of the more far-fetched theories, but you never know; I had actually already reached out to Krabbé, to no reply. Janssens said he would ask around.

Then there was the question of who owned the painting. Aarnout Helb, the director at Greenbox Museum of Contemporary Art from Saudi Arabia, told me he had some ideas, but wouldn’t name anyone. “All the money in Saudi Arabia flows from the top,” he said. “If they made the painting as part of a discussion with the princess, that could be genuine, but it’s unlikely that these are people who have mature insight into how the art world works. And then the price – that’s all an investment thing. I think the ultimate customer they have in mind is the king or the crown prince.” Helb was fairly disparaging about the whole affair. “It just seems like it’s all about money,” he said.

I was keen to find other people who could have worked with Al-Harasan but it proved difficult. Eventually



Did I set this whole thing up? No! But wouldn't it be fantastic if I had?



I managed to track down an art consultant and curator in Saudi Arabia called Basma Harasani. She was, it turned out, a “distant relative” of the inventor’s, but my phone call was the first she’d heard of the *Diriyah Starry Night*. She was intrigued.

“How much are we talking about here?” she asked. “One million, five million?”

“£2.5 million,” I said.

“Well, that kinda narrows down who you’re looking at, right? I would guess it’s someone from the royal family. From my experience working with Saudi collectors – and by that I mean people who can afford to buy an artwork for millions of dollars – there’s just a handful of people. If you could work out who supports Van Gogh, or that movement of art, then that would narrow down your search to, literally, two or three people.”

Are you aware of many collectors who are also princesses?

There was a long pause. “Yes,” she said. “But in Saudi Arabia, the royal family is massive.”

She wouldn’t give me any names. “I wish I could help you more,” she said. “I feel like I’m at the start of a Netflix documentary.” I thought of Van der Most’s comment and smiled.

By now I had made repeated attempts to speak to Al-Harasani, but still he proved elusive. While I awaited a response, I contacted Professor Asif Ahmed, a British biomedical scientist who appeared to be connected to him on social media. He told me he had met Al-Harasani around five years ago at an event in Jeddah, and been a “mentor” to him. Ahmed told me Al-Harasani was “very kind, very humble,” and was well connected to the royal family. “I was very impressed by what he did by putting the Quran into braille electronically,” he said. “Why didn’t anyone else think of that? It’s not like braille wasn’t there, it’s not like electronic things weren’t there. He combined the whole thing and put it into context. I would call him an innovator rather than an inventor.”

I told him it felt like the sort of thinking that could lead to the *Diriyah Starry Night*. Ahmed agreed. “I would call that innovation rather than a creation of something more original from zero, right?” I thought about Van der Most’s algorithmic interpretations of the Old Masters. If indeed Al-Harasani had commissioned the work, I was beginning to wonder if he and Van der Most were more alike than they realised.

Shortly after I put the phone down on Ahmed, I received a message from Al-Harasani in broken English. “Hello dear Will,” he wrote. “Nice to hear from you. About artworks, I don’t have something to say about. And the art work you mentioned is not belong to me. I hoped that I could help you. Thank you and have a great time.”

I pushed back, asking if he could confirm or deny elements of Van der Most’s account, but he failed to respond. The line had gone cold.

It seemed to me that Al-Harasani had perhaps rolled the dice when an opportunity arose to have a bona fide artist authenticate the *Diriyah Starry Night*. It might have been a business project for a specific client, but then a real Jeroen van der Most had landed in Jeddah, paintbrush in hand, ready to sign the artwork. When Van der Most had stood in Al-Harasani’s house, poised to mark his name on the *Diriyah Starry Night*, he had asked Al-Harasani if he was sure he was happy for him to proceed. Van der Most told me that Al-Harasani said it was “good for the marketing.” Al-Harasani certainly seemed serious about

giving the painting authorship. Van der Most told me what happened the day after it was signed. Al Harasani dropped him and Boon off at their hotel in Jeddah. As the car moved through the heat of the city, Van der Most sat in the back and handed Al-Harasani the *Arabian Bloom* artwork that had previously been returned in the post. “It was for the princess,” Van der Most told me. “But he didn’t seem particularly interested.” According to Van der Most, in return Al-Harasani passed back a Certificate of Authenticity for the *Diriyah Starry Night*, along with a simple request: “Could you sign this please?”

AFTER WE’D SPENT the morning at his apartment, Van der Most decided the time had come. We clambered into a dented old Ford estate and drove into the suburbs. The city gave way to fields. A tractor rolled past. I spotted a traditional windmill; in the distance behind it span newer wind turbines. We continued to chat about the painting, and Van der Most’s trip to Saudi Arabia. I had spent so much time embroiled in this mind-fuck of an art piece that I couldn’t completely shake a lingering feeling of suspicion.

We pulled into a leafy drive. I followed Van der Most down a dirt track into an idyllic private community where Amsterdammers keep allotments, studios and summer houses. Wooden cabins tucked away behind well-kept hedges. Van der Most asked me to wait and disappeared behind a privet. It was a beautiful day; the only sounds were birdsong and the wind. I spotted a kingfisher. It was not where I had expected this story to end up.

Five minutes later, Van der Most reemerged and led me to a wooden cabin. The blinds were drawn. Inside had a kitsch 1970s vibe: wood-panelled walls, a kitchenette decked out with bright green and orange tiling. Van der Most beckoned to a chair and asked me to take a seat. I found myself facing a large wooden cabinet on the rear wall of the cabin. Van der Most unlatched the doors and let them swing open. And there it was: the real, fake *Diriyah Starry Night*, hanging against a backdrop of black fabric.

Van der Most flopped into the chair next to me and we sat in silence for a moment. “It’s cool how it catches the light now and again,” he said, rocking back and forth. Pondering the painting, trying to make sense of it, I wondered what someone would think if they barged in on us: two men in a cold cabin enjoying a private exhibition of a rip-off Van Gogh. I wondered where the original painting was, back in Saudi Arabia, and if the princess, businesswoman, Al-Harasani – whoever the owner may be, if they were even real – ever sat and just looked it, as we were.

“How long has it been here?” I asked.

“A couple of months,” says Van der Most. “I don’t want to keep it at my house. It could get touched, or messy in some way.”

“So you’re treating it like it’s really valuable?”

“Definitely,” he said. “Of course, and that’s what we’re adding to even now in some way. I expect at some point it will be exhibited somewhere.” He told me he envisioned a show featuring both versions of the *Diriyah*, and hoped Al-Harasani would cooperate in bringing the artwork to the Netherlands.

We stared at the painting a little longer. I told him I liked it. I think. He laughed. “It’s kind of aesthetically challenged,” he said. “But it does fit really well with the visual aesthetics of current NFT art. You see this new kind of retro ugliness, bright colours... this anything-goes style. And yeah, the golden frame... it’s just stuff on top of more stuff. Fake on top of real on top of fake. It fits that aesthetic really well.”

I noticed that the painting hadn’t been signed.

“I’m holding out for the right moment,” he said. “Or maybe when someone offers £2.6 million... or £3.7 million.”

I gazed back at the real, fake *Diriyah Starry Night* and wondered what, exactly, I was looking at. In normal circumstances, the painting would have been forgettable, tacky, something you might cast your eyes over in a souvenir shop. But Van der Most had constructed a narrative around it that enabled him to deliver an authentic aesthetic experience. What could have been a cynical marketing stunt had been trumped by an even more ambitious one, and whether or not the story about the princess was real or some elaborately staged fiction, Van der Most had created something layered with meaning, a project that was able to trigger a whole range of questions, doubts, ideas and interpretations.

He had made it art. ❧

WILL COLDWELL is a writer based in London.

GQ's Lookbook

ART ABOVE THE LAW



Art Above The Law draws on the creative side of fashion to inspire their designs and curate their original pieces. The concept focuses on breaking rules for art's sake and aims to appeal to likeminded innovators who pride themselves on their individuality. Keep up with what's next for this exciting

brand as they reveal new drops over on their website artabovethelaw.online and their IG @artabovethelaw

BAGRA



Bagra is more than just 5 letters. More than just a brand and a clothing piece you are wearing on your body. Bagra means to always keep fighting, because life is a roller-coaster but you never give up. Bagra is produced in the beautiful homeland of Croatia, sustainably for the environment, for the future and for everyone. Visit bagra-design.com and follow on IG: @bagraDesign

AT WILL



At Will is an emerging brand born and bred out of NY. Showcasing the aim to deliver a mash-up of active wear, leisure-wear, streetwear, and collegiate inspired American staples. The goal being to produce unisex clothing that encourages one's self-realised willpower and vitalising the need to consume consciously. Visit atwillselfmade.com for more and follow @at__will on IG.

B1 STUDIOS



B1 Studios was established in 2019 by Bakary Manjang, the creative behind the modern street wear brand that specialises in denim. Whilst focusing on quality and fitting, all garments are designed in house by hand. Every denim piece is crafted with painstaking attention to detail and no two pairs are the same.

Visit B1-STUDIOS.COM and follow @B1STUDIOS_ on IG.

CAZCARRO



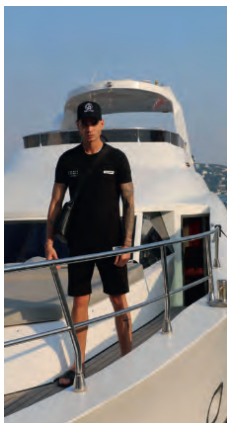
Cazcarro transforms streetwear into luxurious elegance. Their competitive premium quality and form fitting apparel is targeted at Gen Z customers to keep any wardrobe on trend and fresh. Their unique designs and attention to detail stand out from the crowd and their durability means long lasting clothing for all. Visit cazcarro.com and follow on IG: @cazcarro

CRESCENTE PATRICIO



Different but familiar is the design approach anchoring the brand Crescente Patricio. Based in Dallas, TX, Crescente Patricio sources high quality scrap denim to create up-cycled limited collections. Shop the Saddle Pocket Jacket at cpatricio.com and follow the brand @crescente.patricio

CLEAN RUN



Clean Run stems from the phrase 'To have a Clean Run' which denotes to the act of clearing as much financial gains as can possibly be done by that individual. It is a phrase that has resonated deeply within the community that ultimately birthed the brand. They believe that regardless of whatever circumstances, we can still seek and thrive that which allows us to feel like champions. Visit cleanrunclimbing.com and follow on IG @cleanrunclimbing

BLACK TIE WATCH CO



Home to the best watches for men under \$200 – Black Tie Watch Co. is turning up the heat this summer with all new releases. Spyder (pictured) features a distinct skeleton case with a powerful automatic movement guaranteed to become your go-to timepiece. Use code GQ20 for 20% off your next order (expires 23/08/22). Visit blacktiwatchco.com and IG: @blacktiwatchco



KOHLNSTOFF

Since 2015 Kohlenstoff 12 have stood for high quality and handcrafted carbon fiber jewellery and accessories. Their collections also include streetwear inspired stainless steel jewellery and watches as well as fragrances.

Visit kohlenstoff-12.com and follow IG @kohlenstoff_12

JSIME COLLECTIVE

JSIME™ proposes a sophisticated approach to luxury streetwear. Rooted in experimentation and exploration, JSIME™ applies new fashion techniques to create elevated aesthetics and a unique shopping experience. Their online boutique, JSIME COLLECTIVE, delivers exclusive capsules throughout the year, outside of any fashion calendar. Visit

jsimecollective.com and follow @jsimecollective on IG.

ISTO.

ISTO. is an independent brand inspired by the slow fashion movement that focuses on quality, sustainability, and ethical transparency. This everyday essentials brand for men and women knows that a good wardrobe is about organic materials garments made to look amazing, fit perfectly and last longer. Follow @isto.pt on IG and visit isto.pt

ELAREL

ELAREL is an art, homeware, and clothing brand that started as a Melbourne lockdown pass-time in the early days of the pandemic. Focusing on second-hand sourced materials to create up-cycled garments that represent the merging of loungewear, creativity, and experiments, ELAREL is the essence of slow fashion. Follow @elarel on IG or visit elarel.bigcartel.com

FAIRDIM

FAIRDIM Collection One establishes a raw, natural and versatile motif uncontrolled by the division between traditional tailoring and casual wear. The vision amongst the FAIRDIM team is solely embedded in delicately blurring the barrier between these two domains whilst remaining in keeping with the essence of elegance. Visit fairdim.com and follow on IG: @fairdim

LOVE FOR C/O®

Love For C/O® Greek mythology-series with design Poseidon, Zeus and the new Pegasos. Their stunning pieces are carefully

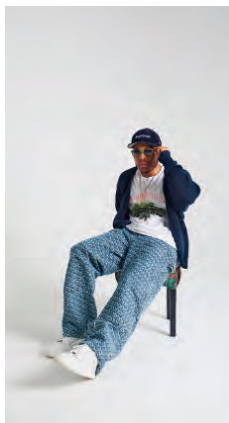
crafted by hand and made from the highest quality sterling silver. During the Autumn 2022 new designs will be released, produced in the spirit of silversmith Robin Sebastian Saint. Visit lovefor.co and follow @loveforco on IG.

EAST VALLEY

East Valley is a London based premium eyewear brand, with a culture that aspires to create a cool, luxury feeling. The motto: 'True Visionary', reflects their forward-thinking nature and the need to be trend setters in style and creativity. To live life with passion and look great while doing it, visit east-valley.co.uk and follow on IG: @eastvalleyuk

JUGGURNAUTH

Founded and designed in London. Juggurnauth is an everyday, luxurious capsule clothing collection with an emphasis on inclusivity, sustainability and diversity. This gender inclusive line, with a colour palette that lends itself to all ethnicities, is committed to mindful, environmental manufacturing - from the yarns used to the recyclable packaging. A percentage of every purchase will go towards their chosen children's charity. Helping the future generation become a powerful force. Visit juggurnauth.com and follow @juggurnauth_ on IG.

MISUNDERSTOOD

Misunderstood came about in 2018. Their goal is to give people a way to express themselves through their striking clothing. The brand is for everyone that has ever been Misunderstood. Shown here is their Misunderstood Groovee t-shirt. Visit misunderstoodnewyork.com and follow @misunderstood_newyork on IG.



GQ's Lookbook

HOUSE OF CAVANI



House Of Cavani represents a balance between Italian formality and traditional English style. The creative hub has a vision of being the ultimate one-stop-shop; with styles embossing the meaning of being a true gentleman. This year, Cavani is supplying the wedding season with lightweight linens and bright tweeds. With the aim of dressing all to-be-grooms, wedding attendees and Father-in-laws to impress. Visit cavani.co.uk and follow @houseofcavani on IG.



WINNERS CIRCLE



Winners Circle, founded by Armand Tshela and Jimmy Kananura, are the clothing and lifestyle label blending streetwear and contemporary ready-to-wear garments. While crafting timeless styles, the mission is about building a community of excellence and originality. Visit winnerscircleuk.com and follow @winnerscirclelondon

on IG to discover the Spring/Summer '22 Collection.

MLMH STUDIOS



European aesthetic meets New York's street style culture – MLMH STUDIOS is the up and coming streetwear brand. Founded in Germany back in 2020, MLMH STUDIOS is now based and directed in the lifestyle capital of the world, New York City. While the major breakthrough has yet to happen, internationally recognised celebrities and professional athletes believe in the vision of Leon Grüneke, the brand's founder and creative director. Visit mlmhstudios.com and IG @mlmhnewyork

erEvan



Since 2020, erEvan creates timeless pieces that are calling for travel. Flowing cuts and light colours are combined with high end materials such as Japanese denim to create a poetic and ethereal allure. A collection of fragrances will soon complete the brand's inspiring synaesthesia. Visit erevanofficial.com and follow @erevanofficial on IG.



NASTALGIA



Established in 2018, NASTALGIA was founded by Akeem Bloch while studying at the Fashion Institute of Technology. The brand strives to create garments with an emotional appeal that will stand the test of time. Based in NYC, NASTALGIA focuses on storytelling and building a community through fashion. They hope to inspire those from a small town, like the designer, where dreams are bigger than their environment. Visit nastalgiaofficial.com and follow @nastalgiaofficial on IG.

PRESSED UP



Pressed Up is a clothing brand that provides an authentic streetwear experience. Using their sphere of influence, they curate a unique collection of quality garments. Each design is inspired by an influence of their lifestyle. The purpose of the Sphere of Influence is to realise that greatness begins within and travels outward. With that being said, you can fulfil any desire you dream of by surrounding yourself with the right pieces to achieve your goal.

Visit pressedup.shop and follow @pressedup on IG.

ONISHI



Onishi is a high-end underwear brand created by Takayuki Onishi who dreamed about underwear that both looks and feels sexy. Onishi has been newly launched and now you can try them for yourself. The underwear is made with Modal which is a lightweight luxury textile and is ideal for everyday wear. Visit onishi.us and follow on IG: @onishi.us

SCAVINI



Scavini are a brand who pride themselves on offering trousers for every occasion. With these pleated trousers, even the simplest summer outfit becomes elevated. The fabrics highlight airy blends of tropical wool, linen or silk. Trousers that offer both style and quality.

Visit pantalons-scavini.fr and follow @scaviniparis on IG.

OILL CLOTHING



The first idea for OILL clothing was born in 2018 heavily inspired by the loud developing streetwear culture. Max Oellig, creator, believes there are many ways to make clothing meaningful and how clothing can become a piece of art itself. OILL is a brand rooted in creating significant moments for individuals who desire the most from the scarce resources of the world. Mark your cross OX. Visit oill-clothing.com and follow @oill.ox on IG.

BOZHAO



Exploring the space in between times, cultures, style, and drawing inspirations from his life experiences, Bo Zhao, Beijing-born and New York based menswear designer describes his work as unexpected and conflicted, yet classic and detailed. His take on traditional tailoring techniques and second to none craftsmanship is unmistakable, yet emphasises on daily

functions and performance. Visit bozhastudio.com and follow on IG: @bo_bozhao

NEW BRAVES



New Braves is a world-conscious clothing laboratory, creating garments that celebrate comfort and community. From design to production, they stand for sustainability and fair wages. They align to fair practices by exploring local craftsmanship, partnering with honourable manufacturers, and using recycled and dead-stock materials. Their concepts take shape in their studios in Montevideo, Uruguay and Los Angeles, where their space functions as a showroom for their line. Their production partners are based in both the US and Uruguay.

Visit newbraves.com

RETTOR WATCHES



Designed in New York and expertly crafted in the heart of Switzerland's watchmaking district, the RETTOR 22 is a vintage twist on contemporary wristwatch design. Featuring a hand-finished stainless-steel case, Swiss Automatic movement, radial brushed dial, 200M of water resistance – at an accessible price point – affordable luxury is here. Visit rettorwatches.com to learn about the upcoming preorder, and follow @rettorwatches on IG.

MARE DE VETRO



and follow @maredevetro.seaofglass on IG.

Explore a curated collection of the most definitive pieces for the modern man. The Mattaeo Collection showcases refined luxurious jewellery. Mare De Vetro is an Australian based brand that combines traditional craftsmanship with the finest materials and a design ethos that prioritises purity and integrity. Visit maredevetro.com.au

TAKEI



TAKEI is a lifestyle brand centred around comfort with style and a passion for sustainability. Every Takei product including bedding, loungewear, and casual-wear are made from bamboo soft fabric, gentle to the touch. Categorised as a grass, bamboo is a renewable resource and regenerates naturally, while requiring no pesticides. By centring their brand around natural bamboo fabric, they are dedicating themselves to a more sustainable future.

Shop online at takeihome.com and follow @takeistore on IG.

VENEDICTUS



Established on 22/2/22, Venedictus was founded by 19 year old Filipino/Syrian twin brothers. The tag line tells of the mental hardships they endured and overcame while working to bring the brand to life. The versatile aesthetics ensure pieces can be styled to suit one's desired look. Hailing from Adelaide, Venedictus is one of the premium Australian streetwear brands to watch out for. Visit venedictus.com and follow @venedictus_ on IG.

GQ's Lookbook

HALF/ALIVE



HALF/ALIVE is a premium clothing brand born and bred in Singapore. Embracing exclusivity, every drop is limited edition to bring only the best to their customers. Every release is conscientiously planned and crafted to ensure novelty and luxury for all who discover it. The brand donates to charities supporting mental health for every piece sold.

Visit halfaliveclo.com and follow @halfaliveclo on IG.



STORM ACTIVE



Designing a better future. STORM ACTIVE is a London based athleisure brand. Blurring the line between form and function with an emphasis on transparency, sustainability and diversity. Committed to contributing to the environment whilst being ethical and offering products to the highest of standards.

To find out more follow @storm.active on IG and visit stormactive.com

REVERSE DESCENT



Reverse Descent is 'luxury inspired by spirit'. This luxury streetwear company focuses on embedding luxury

features, materials, silhouettes, and techniques within each collection and release. Collections primarily draw inspiration from Roman Gothic fundamentals, scripture, and angelic visuals. The team looks to prioritise finite details that make the sum a whole and focus on the grey space between falling and becoming. Visit reversedescentclothing.com and follow @reverse_descent

DAD BOD SNIPER



Dad Bod Sniper is a high end body inclusive menswear brand that exudes confidence for men of all shapes. The brand represents creativity and comfort through simplicity. At Dad Bod Sniper quality is the standard. Visit dadbodsniper.com and follow @dadbodsniper on IG.

FULLORD



ENKAI necklace and ENKAI ring in rose gold and black ceramics. The ENKAI collection takes inspiration from the traditional masai spear, a childhood memory of creative director Sandrine Thibaud, born and raised in Africa.

Visit fullord.com and follow on IG: @fullordgeneva

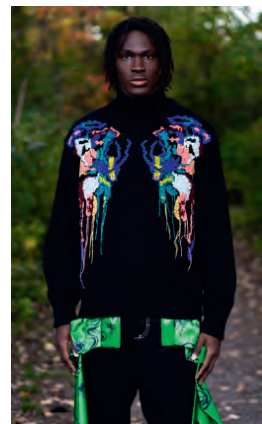
CLOUDBURST CLOTHING



Cloudburst Clothing is a fashion label that produces high quality modern casualwear with a vintage feel. Founded in

2021, The Original Collection including The Castlefield T Shirt seen here pays homage to Manchester which is the birthplace of the brand and the inspiration behind many of their designs. The brand aim is to continually bring high quality, responsibly sourced clothing to their customers. Visit cloudburstclothing.com and follow @cloudburstltd on IG.

OSCAR MENDOZA



Oscar Mendoza is a Montreal based couture designer and tailor. His designs are intricate, bold, full of texture and colour. His influences come from his Mexican roots, his experiences living in Europe and his love for the arts. Oscar designs for a creative client who likes to dare and who inspires others with his wardrobe. Visit oscardmendoza.ca and follow on IG: @oscardmendoza_design

CHECKMATE SOCKS



Checkmate Socks is a premium clothing brand with a social mission to raise awareness for Mental Health. 'Check your mates are ok. It could save a life one day!' 10% of all sales are donated to Mental Health Charities. Shop their exclusive sock collections, luxury hoodies and active wear range at checkmatesocks.com

JOJO RINGS



JoJo Rings upcycles old keys into one-of-a-kind jewellery and donates \$5 with every purchase. Each key is unique, making their rings and wraps a statement to wear. You can even find vintage car keys in their speciality shop!

Send in your own special key for an even more meaningful ring. Learn more at jojorings.com and follow along on IG @jojorings

Style File



1

VARSITY JACKET €169.90
MOSQUETS.DE
IG: @MOSQUETSCLO



2

LITTLE LEWIS DBL £59.95
PIGANDHEN.CO.UK
IG: @PIGANDHEN



3

EMBROIDERED CAMP SHIRT \$255
SAMUELZELIG.COM



4

JOHRENE SHOES BLUE \$209
JOHRENESHOES.COM
IG: @JOHRENESHOES



5

ZIP-HOODIE "FOUR HEADS" STONE GREY €89.90
SPOILTSOCIETY.COM
IG: @SPOILTSOCIETY.OFFICIAL



6

CLASSIC HOODIE
BOAKE-ACTIVEWEAR.COM
IG: @BOAKE.ACTIVEWEAR



8

MESH TRUCKER CAP
CROWNHUSTLE.CO.UK
IG: @CROWNHUSTLE



10

MADE TO MEASURE NAVY BLAZER FROM £870
JACK-DAVISON.CO.UK
IG: @JACK_DAVISON_BESPOKE



7

SPEED PAST DESTINY TEE
419DRIVER.COM
IG: @419DRIVER



9

2IN1 HIGH SLIT LINED SHORT
NOTHINGSSOMETHING.COM
IG: @NOTHINGSSOMETHING



11

ESSENTIALS HOODIE €70
WHY2LATE.COM
IG: @WHY2LATE



12

CROC EMBOSSED OVERSHIRT
LXRYAPPAREL.COM
IG: @LXRYAPPVREL_



13

MICROFIBER ANORAK €109
GALIENTE.COM
IG: @GALIENTE_



14

SAWBLADE CREWNECK
AVAUNT.US
IG: @AVAUNT.US



15

PINK STRIPED SHIRT
HOCKERTY.UK
IG: @HOCKERTY.MEN

1. Mosquets, founded in 2017, is a design venture born in Germany, combining luxury garments with a contemporary streetwear style. All products are made in Portugal. Environmental and sustainable thought always have the greatest importance when coming across new ideas and designs. Their products are meant to last for a while. Ranging from fashion to photography, film to furniture, each collection tells a story. **2. Pig & Hen** is a bold and refined brand producing handmade bracelets in Amsterdam for men, capitalising on a unique and authentic brand story. To protect themselves from bad luck, mariners inked tattoos of a pig and a hen on their feet as crates of pigs and hens were oftentimes the only items left floating after a shipwreck. The sailors believed a pig and hen tattoo would help them not only survive the strongest of storms, but also allow them to float back safely to their beloved homeland. Strong, unique and sustainable. **3. Samuel Zelig** focuses on a contemporary approach to uniform silhouettes taking inspiration from workwear of the past. Applied through a variety of mediums, all artwork is original and created by the Samuel Zelig team. **4. Johrene Shoes**, where class meets style. Who says a sportswear brand can't be elegant? Who says sneakers can't be seen as exquisite and refined? Each Johrene original is carefully conceived using the finest Italian leather, focusing on individuality for every aspect of its design and catering to an audience with an elevated standard for quality, fashion and lifestyle. **5. SPOILT SOCIETY** is an emerging streetwear brand which is dedicated to bringing you the cool and edgy trends currently found in the streetwear domain. Dustin Schneider, the founder, has been involved in the street art scene and managed to channel his experiences and impressions within this subculture into individual limited edition apparel lines. SPOILT SOCIETY only use supreme garments and highest quality manufacturing processes to make your clothes as long-lasting as possible. **6. Boake Activewear** presents their Classic Hoodie. Specifically designed for your warm up and trips to and from the gym a durable, flexible cotton blend allows for a wide range of movement whilst hidden zip pockets provide a great storage option. **7. Established** in late 2019, streetwear brand **419DRIVER** aims to create garments like you've never seen before. Founded by young Creative Director and CEO Andrew Chiappetta, he has built his brand to exciting new heights. From custom cut hoodies and t-shirts, to oversized prints and decorative knits, be sure to keep up with the brand as they continue to grow and provide more exclusive and unique pieces. **8.** Fashion designer CJ Mabvario presents **CROWNHUSTLE**, a minimalist line that is mixed with a message. A juxtaposition between classic fashion and everyday streetwear. Birthed in a global pandemic, the brand is designed to be disruptive and break barriers for all, with it being a unisex high fashion brand. **9.** Stockholm based athleisure label, **Nothing's Something** (abbr. "NOSO") celebrates the modern polymath. They are the sportswear label for the culturally and creatively astute. NOSO has developed the perfect activewear attire for the modern, creative and intellectual. Go to IG @nothingssomething or nothingssomething.com to find the sportswear label for the modern human. **10. Jack Davison** offer the finest bespoke and made to measure tailoring. Bringing the flair of Mayfair to the City, whilst challenging the traditions of Savile row with contemporary cuts and keen eye for fabrics. Visit their website to make an appointment at their central London atelier. **11. WHY2LATE** is definitely not your ordinary fast fashion brand. With its special and unique designs, they try to change the streetwear market and remind us why we "always react 2 late". Their statement pieces hit the nerve of today's consumers wants and needs as their unique pieces are 100% sustainable and ethically produced. **12. LXRY Apparel** is a fashion house based out of Atlanta redefining the idea of luxury. Specialising in outerwear, the brand intentionally contrasts high end garments with nostalgic vintage touches. **13. Galiente** is a lifestyle brand focusing on the perfect fit and quality. Since the beginning, their collections have reflected an influence from sports, art, music and various eras of youth culture. Galiente is much more than a brand, its about style and attitude. **14. Avaunt** is a distinctive project based research label located in PHX, AZ that is growing to new heights with their unique wardrobe essentials. The brand combines graphic design principles and vast storytelling, this synthesis creates the innovative brand Avaunt. **15. Hockerty** is an innovative e-commerce brand, providing high quality, customisable clothing and footwear. Now an established and notable company, Hockerty has become an essential style service for hundreds of thousands of customers worldwide. With only the best attention to detail, Hockerty's team working across Zurich, Barcelona, and Shanghai work to offer new custom products. Hockerty is helping to build a world based on a global society that buys less, buys better and buys clothes and shoes that last and fit perfectly.

Style File



JT JAMMER £110
COOTS-LONDON.COM
IG: @COOTS_LONDON



NAUTICAL C3 £20
FORTUNABEADS.COM
IG: @FORTUNA_BEADS



4444 'GEM' SUNGLASSES \$44.44
4X1111.COM
IG: @4X1111



HARDY ORANGE STRIPE - £49
LIBERTAS-LONDON.COM
IG: @LIBERTAS.LONDON



**URBAN PEACH COLOUR
LEATHER SNEAKERS £248**
VIVVANT.CO.UK
IG: @VIVVANT



**MEN'S STRIPED BROWN
CREW SOCKS**
SOMATCHI.COM
IG: @SOMATCHICOM



EARTH HOODIE \$86
CASTAWAYCLUBCLOTHING.COM
IG: @CASTAWAYCLUBCLOTHING



WINDBREAKER BABY BLUE - £65
TROPEZOFFICIAL.COM
IG: @TROPEZOFFICIAL



EL AY STAR HAT \$96
AYLAYEN.COM
IG: @AYLAYEN



FEEL GOOD CHINOS \$108
PERK CLOTHING.COM
IG: @SHOP,PERK



WHITE 3D ASCOT £130
ZACHFOOTWEAR.COM
IG: @ZACHFOOTWEAR



CLASSIC SHORT SLEEVE BUTTON UP - SEERSUCKER \$185
ALEXANDRIABYALEXANDER.COM
IG: @ALEXANDRIA



SUNWALKER £71
MERCHANTSOFTHESUN.COM.AU
IG: @MERCHANTSOFTHESUN

16. COOTS London is an independent performance swimwear brand. Their collections are expertly crafted in a zero-waste factory in East London. Each suit is inspired by the art of swimming and constructed from a fabric made entirely from recycled plastic and fishing nets saved from the ocean. Perfect for those who want to swim but not compromise on design. **17. The Nautical C3 bracelet from FortunaBeads** is the perfect accessory for this summer. With a white-blue nylon cord and a vintage copper d-shackle clasp, you can wear it with your casual outfit for a nice day at the beach. Express your personality, through unique handcrafted wrist-wear. Shop now, use code GQ20 to get 20% off your order (expires 23/8/22). Based in the Netherlands. **18. 4x1111** is an eclectic clothing brand based out of Central Texas. The brand features contemporary tapestry outerwear as well as casual lifestyle and ready to wear premium products. Started out of a bedroom in 2019, the brand quickly found its roots in unfamiliar grounds, and solidified itself as a fresh and innovative line in the fashion industry. **19. Libertas London** aim to offer a sustainable approach to fashion that not only looks great but helps to contribute towards cleaning up our planet. Each pair of their premium swim shorts are manufactured from 10 recycled plastic bottles, helping to give a second use to single-use plastics. Their Orange Stripe shorts exude effortless sophistication. Wear them poolside for easy and instant style. **20. VIVVANT.** Designed in London, handcrafted in Florence. This sneaker constitutes a beautiful addition to the modern man. The urban design of the shoe allows a very versatile association with smart casual outfits as well as a basic combination of a t-shirt and a pair of jeans. **21. Founded in 2020, Somatchi** is an accessory brand inspired by love and craftsmanship. They are passionate about making "a little difference that makes big difference." Their original, cheerful and timeless products are designed to make you feel confident. Obsessed with the tiniest detail during the product development process, they make your wearing experience the top priority. **22. Tropez** brings you their debut windbreaker in the sought after Baby Blue colour-way. Designed with a central front zip with elasticated cuffs and drawcords at the hood and base of the jacket, the garment is smartly branded with an embroidered logo on the left arm to subtly finish the appearance. There is no doubt as to why this item sold out so quickly when it launched and why the restock is so highly anticipated. Visit their website to see more. **23. ay el ay en** is a social experiment. Taking items that one is familiar with and then adding their own design language onto it. In turn it changes one's perspective of how the item is now viewed in comparison to when it existed without it. Whether hated or loved, it exists to trigger response. **24. Celebrate Mother Earth** year round, don't just give her one month! The all new Earth Hoodie gives you all the comfort of your favourite blanket, combined with the styles that rival your favourite pieces in your closet. **Castaway Club Clothing.** Chicago's Very Own since 2019. **25. Founded on the beaches of Australia, Merchants of the Sun** exclusively craft recycled jewellery. Embodying sustainability from ideation to manufacturing through a 'cradle to cradle' method, ensuring all waste is minimised in production. Dressing you for the future through the balance of ethics and aesthetic. Their motto is make few, design well. **26. Perk Clothing's** physique-flattering t-shirts and chinos elevate these everyday basics with extra attention to look and feel. Silky 100% Pima cotton t-shirts in rich, classic colours are cut to emphasise your arms and chest. Their soft, stretchy chinos will make sure to get you noticed. **27. Born and conceptualised in London, Zach Footwear** began with the aim of creating high quality, unique footwear at affordable prices. They have set a precedent with outstanding packaging and customer communication that has matched a premium product. Zach offers premium quality handcrafted shoes combining luxury leather and fabric, with unique designs. They source premium leathers from Italy, and all their shoes are handcrafted in Portugal. **28. Based in Los Angeles and currently designed from New York, Alexandria By Alexander,** provides versatility from coast to coast. From sharp lines to leisure fabrics, with colours of the Caribbean and Mediterranean, the label meticulously seeks classic elegance through silhouettes and fine detailing; it finds power through simplicity.

Summer Hours



1

SNOW STAR - BOREAL GREEN £1380
MILUS.COM
IG: @MILUSWATCHES



2

WOLKOV.DESIGN
IG: @WOLKOV.DESIGN



3

EVO SINGLE WATCH WINDER - £325
RAPPORTLONDON.COM
IG: @RAPPORT_LONDON



4

DEEPSTAR II BLUE RAY
AQUASTAR.CH
IG: @AQUASTARWATCHES

1. Milus. The new Snow Star - Boreal Green features everything you would expect from a modern Swiss timepiece, 100m water resistance, a reliable ETA 2892-A2 (top grade) movement, 42 hours of power reserve and a fully polished 904L stainless-steel case. Thanks to its sunray-finish, the bright and bold green dial captures the light, creating a characteristic subtle glow that changes with each movement of the wrist. **2.** Finally, something serious yet elegant for all the wrists out there tired of wearing the same old GMT/Sub/Chrono. **WOLKOV** is designed in Shanghai by a French designer with mix Russian/Corsican origins; a great microbrand pushing the watch industry into something fresh and classy. Straps are interchangeable as they can be snapped onto the case thanks to the extra-size lugs. Be bold, your wrist deserves it. **3. Rapport London.** A watch winder expertly designed to keep your watch ticking. Finished with a high gloss lacquered casing and a supple leather watch holder. The EVO Watch Winder features multiple direction and TPD speed settings. **4. The Aquastar Deepstar II** is the evolution of the original Deepstar from 1963, relying on the same patent of the original piece that enables calculating multiple dive and decompression times while housing a non-chronograph, easy to use 3 hand mechanism, and moderately sized 37mmX46mm for great comfort of wear.

Inside Out

1. Pia Kintrup is showcasing her 'the nonexistent areas are of particular interest' open series. The theme of her series is the impact of borders and ultimate control of information in places that creates a parallel world. These scenarios are artificial settings and constructions which create conflicts within our everyday life. The idea is to create a photographic, mixed media installation that brings a new perspective about universal themes such as control, staging, surveillance, and value. She is represented by Galerie Ricarda Fox. Visit piakintrup.com and follow on IG @piakintrup

2. Tanya of **STEWART ART STUDIO** is a Canadian oil painter and photographer, with a love for all things nature and cultural exploration. This alchemy is inspired by her affliction with biophilia and translated onto canvas or through her lens in her West Coast art studio, located in Squamish, British Columbia. Visit stewartartstudio.com and follow @stewartartstudio on IG.

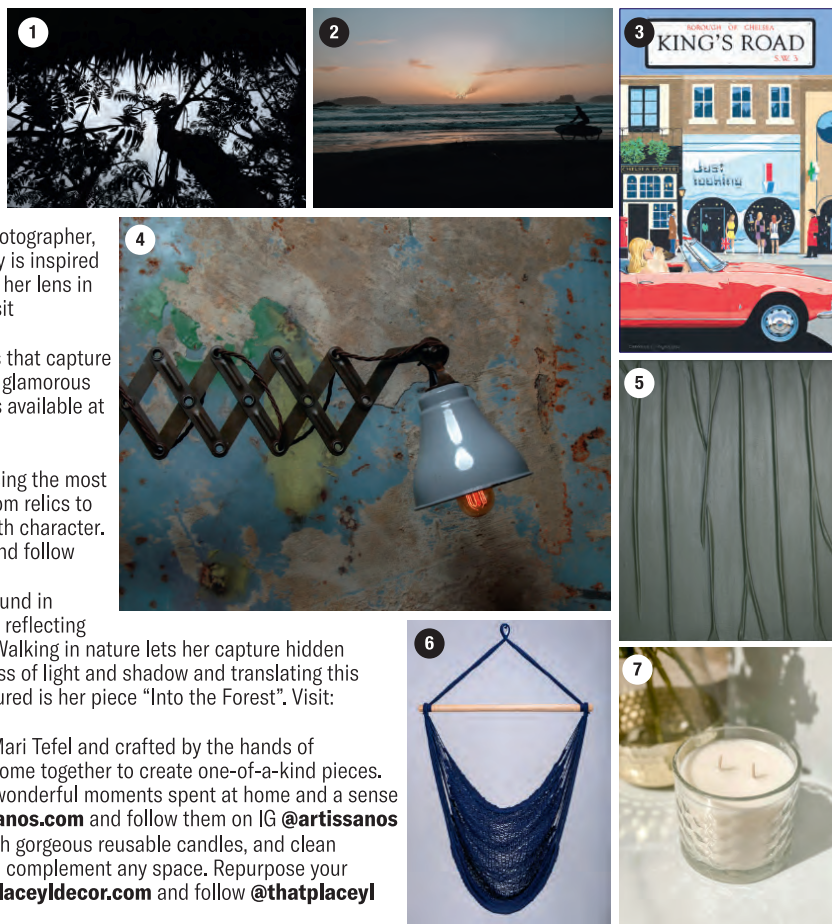
3. Pullman Editions designs striking original limited-edition posters that capture the enduring appeal of Art Deco. Their posters feature winter sports, glamorous resorts around the world, and historic automobiles. Over 100 designs available at £420 each. Call 020 7730 0547 or view and buy online at pullmaneditions.com

4. Based in San Francisco, **HEIMWEE ANTIQUES** is known for sourcing the most unique and peculiar items in the market. From oddities to folk art, from relics to artifacts, their expertly curated pieces will certainly fill your home with character. Check out their eye-catching inventory at heimweeantiques.com and follow @heimweeantiques on IG.

5. Hesho Serray is a Sweden-based artist with a love for textures found in nature. Hesho translates earth's beauty into her artwork, focusing on reflecting nature's different forms, colours, energies and exciting expressions. Walking in nature lets her capture hidden details, where the symphony of life occurs, discovering the playfulness of light and shadow and translating this directly into her artwork. Creativity is part of her soul's journey! Featured is her piece "Into the Forest". Visit: heshoserray.com and follow on IG: @heshoserray

6. ARTISSANOS premium handmade home goods are designed by Mari Tefel and crafted by the hands of Nicaraguan artisans. Their impeccable craftsmanship and tradition come together to create one-of-a-kind pieces. We are confident that Artissanos pieces will be subtle reminders of wonderful moments spent at home and a sense of goodness given to the artisan communities. Shop online at artissanos.com and follow them on IG @artissanos

7. That Place You Like offers the final touch to your home decor with gorgeous reusable candles, and clean ingredients. From vintage to modern candles, there is variety that will complement any space. Repurpose your vessel into storage for your bathroom, kitchen, and more. Visit thatplaceyldecor.com and follow @thatplaceyl on IG.



Slick And Easy



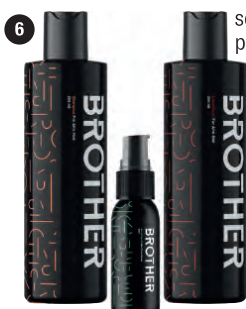
1. NO GUNK makes award-winning all-natural haircare for funky fellas! Their new Funky Flex Cream is a game-changer for managing those longer lockdown inspired hairstyles. Freshly awarded Best Male Hair Product 2022, this 100% natural styling cream is made with mineral rich kaolin, rose water and hemp oil. It's easy to apply and unlike most hair creams, it offers a firm hold - giving you a textured natural look with a matte finish. This makes it the perfect choice for medium-long hairstyles. Washing it out couldn't be easier too! As always, there's no residue on your hands or hair after use. Shop online at nogunk.com and get 15% off with the code GQJULY22 (expires 23/08/22). Follow [@nogunkofficial](https://www.instagram.com/nogunkofficial) on IG.



2. Groom Kings' Biotin Shampoo is the feature product of this latest lifestyle brand to make waves in Dubai. Founded by a barber who made it his mission to create authentic, natural products for his clients. Their premium range of hair and beard products infused with beneficial oils and fruity scents will leave you feeling fresh and groomed - like a KING. Visit groomkings.com and follow [@groom_kings](https://www.instagram.com/groom_kings) on IG.

3. Monarch's hair pomade uses the best all-natural ingredients. The product is formulated to moisturise your hair and beard without weighing it down. The pomade is also offered in five unique scents to leave you feeling and smelling great. Visit themonarchbrand.com and follow [@themonarchbrand](https://www.instagram.com/themonarchbrand) on IG and twitter.

4. Mr Pink by BlackCliff Parfums. A clarion call of yuzu and bergamot usher in this unusual mystical gourmand fragrance burnished with the saffron-glazed, smoke-infused layers of butter, candied notes and toasted vanilla which constitute Mr. Pink's heart. It's soul is deeply resinous and contemplative, laden with precious resin, sacred sandalwood and oakmoss for a polished finish. Stocked in Perfumology, Pennsylvania. Visit blackcliff.com and follow [@blackcliffparfums](https://www.instagram.com/blackcliffparfums) on IG.



5. Nuzest Good Green Vitality is a go-to daily nutritious supplement allowing you to look, feel and perform your best. A complex multi-nutrient formula with over 75 high-quality vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients. Designed to support immunity, digestion, vitality, and optimal wellbeing, every day. Visit nuzest.co.uk and follow [@nuzest_europe](https://www.instagram.com/nuzest_europe) on IG.

6. Brother is a mission-driven, all-natural haircare and skincare brand developed for the needs of black men. Their set of three complimentary products are designed to leave afro/textured hair and beards feeling hydrated, protected and nourished with moisture. Visit getbrother.com and follow [@getbrother](https://www.instagram.com/getbrother) on IG.



7. Cúram Nádúrtha is dedicated to making high-quality holistic personal care products that are free from toxic chemicals, artificial fragrances, and animal testing. All of their formulas are handmade using only 100% certified organic ingredients sourced from sustainable sources. Discover your inner balance and cater for all aspects of your body, skin, and hair. Visit curamnadurtha.com and follow [@curam_nadurtha](https://www.instagram.com/curam_nadurtha) on IG.



8. Montgomery May London is a premium men's wellness and beauty brand founded in 2018. The brand makes top quality grooming and hair care products with premium formulas to transform your appearance and restore your confidence. The shampoo and conditioner bundle exudes elegance with a wonderful Oud fragrance, making it the ideal grooming set. Discover the diverse collection at montgomerymaylondon.com and follow [@montgomerymaylondon](https://www.instagram.com/montgomerymaylondon) on IG.

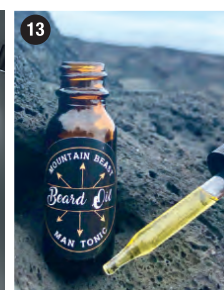
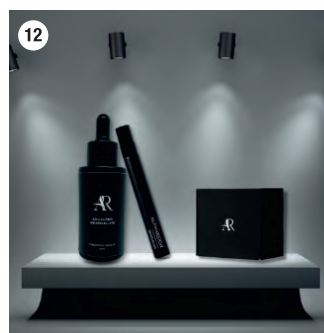
9. ALPHAGUY delivers a premium range of skincare aiming to fight the signs of aging and improve skin appearance. Created with rich ingredients like red micro-algae, alpha and beta hydroxy acids, volcanic pumice, bamboo stem and copper-bonded peptides. Visit alphaguy.com and follow on IG: [@alphaguy](https://www.instagram.com/alphaguy)

10. Curated in Canada, Balens created the world's first 2-in-1 hair product inspired by the Yin-Yang, a symbol of balance. The original 2-in-1 container was designed to deliver a high quality clay and pomade all in one container allowing the freedom to customise your look and ultimately find your Balens. Vegan friendly, water soluble and versatility at its finest. Visit findbalens.com and follow on IG: [@findbalens](https://www.instagram.com/findbalens)

11. Barbe de Rue keeps it simple with quality, naturally-derived ingredients and functional packaging. Their products are lightly scented, suitable for vegans and cruelty free. Shop for beard oil, beard balm, moisturiser, matte clay and their everyday soap that is perfect for shaving at barbederue.bigcartel.com Made in the UK. Follow [@barbederue](https://www.instagram.com/barbederue) on IG.



12. The Alphareign Beard Elixir is composed of 10 organic oils, including Black Seed & Prickly Pear. This unique blend promotes healthy beard growth, aiming to nourish with moisture and repair the appearance of facial hair. Available in 4 premium scents, or go all natural. Shop now at alphareign.co.uk and get 20% off with code 'ARGQ20' (expires 17/09/22). IG: [@alphareign](https://www.instagram.com/alphareign)



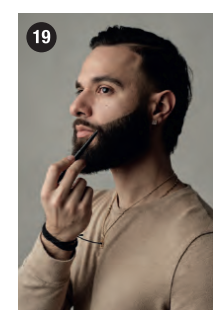
13. Mountain Beast Man Tonic's signature scent combines deep forest notes with delicate tones to make a clean scent with a hint of sophistication. Founded by two women who handcraft an organic, raw eco friendly grooming line for you, that really works. Scent profile: cedarwood, clove and citrus. Visit mountainbeastmantonic.com and follow [@mountainbeastmantonic](https://www.instagram.com/mountainbeastmantonic) on IG.



14. Don & Danny is India's first mens makeup brand to curate high potency products infused with the power of Indian botanical herbs. Their tinted sunscreen is a dynamic moisturiser enriched with SpF 30++, leaving your skin feeling protected and hydrated. It has a light natural tint that gives light coverage to the face, aiming to conceal blemishes and dullness. The perfect skin shield to face everyday with confidence and strength. Visit donanddanny.com and follow [@donanddanny](https://www.instagram.com/donanddanny) on IG.



15. L'Élixir Cosmetique's Organic Beard Oil is a complete formula aimed at optimising beard growth. Suitable for short beards and pleasant to the touch, with 99.7% of the ingredients coming from organic farming and 100% of the ingredients being of natural origin. Including coconut oil, sweet almond oil and atlas cedar essential oil. Visit lrx.men and follow [@lrxmen](https://www.instagram.com/lrxmen) on IG.



16. Combat the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles with this natural, vegan serum by **L'Organic**. A nourishing blend of vitamin C rich arnica oil and apple and blackcurrant fruit extracts, its properties provide essential nutrients. Visit lorganiq.com and follow on IG [@lorganiq](https://www.instagram.com/lorganiq)

17. Orbyt is a UK skincare brand that delivers top-of-the-line products straight to your door every month at a very competitive price. Meant to be simple, you just take a short quiz and they provide you with the perfect skincare routine for your skin type and lifestyle. And for a limited time, they are offering a free trial. Visit orbytskin.com to get started.

18. Men are Ment to take care of themselves. That's why **Ment's** premium skincare has been designed specifically for men, using the most effective all-natural Australian ingredients. Their simple Clean and Hydrate Set aims to help leave your skin feeling refreshed and ultra-hydrated. Visit mentskincare.com or follow on IG: [@ment.skin](https://www.instagram.com/ment.skin)

19. Scattered beards will no longer be a part of your life with **Joseph Signature Line's** Beard Filler Pencil. Easily define, style and enhance your beard shape to create a restored and natural appearance. This waterproof, anti-fouling and anti-sweat formula lasts throughout the day. Visit josephsignatureline.com and follow [@ijay_beardedbarber](https://www.instagram.com/ijay_beardedbarber) on IG.

20. Wellman Gummies provide comprehensive nutritional support for the man who wants it all. Each delicious, vegan, natural orange flavour gummy is packed with 22 nutrients to help maintain overall health, including vitamins B6, B12 and copper which contribute to normal energy release, as well as pantothenic acid, Siberian Ginseng and Coenzyme Q10. Wellman chewable Gummies are ideal for those who don't like swallowing tablets. To find out more visit wellman.co.uk RRP £15.95.



21. Whatever your skin type, **JĀSŌN Men's** has got you covered. With the 2-in-1 face and body wash, caring for your skin just got a whole lot easier. With three ranges catering to dry, sensitive or all skin types, skin is cleansed the natural way with dermatologically tested, vegan, SLS free and biodegradable formulations. Visit jasonnaturalcare.co.uk and follow [@jasonnaturalcare](https://www.instagram.com/jasonnaturalcare) on IG.



Slick And Easy



22. Cannaluxe full-spectrum skincare products are meticulously formulated using whole-plant cannabinoids enhanced with a proprietary terpene blend. Their products aim to reduce the appearance of puffiness and inflammation, leaving your skin nourished with moisture. Plant-based, gluten-free, and cruelty-free. Visit cannaluxe.com and follow [@cannaluxebeauty](https://www.instagram.com/cannaluxebeauty) on IG.

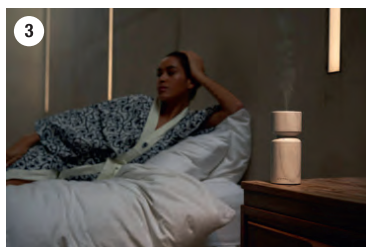
23. SmileTime is the UK's leading premium at home oral cosmetics brand. Their carefully formulated sensitivity free teeth whitening formula is made in the UK and is designed to conveniently fit into your home self-care routine. Partnered with national UK dental chain Smileright, SmileTime has developed a minty fresh formula which is vegan, clinically proven and provides effective smile brightening results in just 20 minutes, giving you a smile confidence boost in the comfort of your own home. Visit smiletimeteeth.com and follow them on IG: [@smiletimeteeth](https://www.instagram.com/smiletimeteeth)

24. COSMO skincare products are made with natural ingredients and are cruelty-free and vegan-friendly. They use high-grade recyclable glass bottles and cardboard packaging where possible. The effective and concentrated formula aims to increase the lifespan of the product while reducing your skin's exposure to synthetics and other chemicals. COSMO maintains a strong commitment to men's mental wellbeing, supporting various charitable organisations. Visit [cosmo-skincare](https://cosmo-skincare.com) and follow [@cosmo.skincare.official](https://www.instagram.com/cosmo.skincare.official) on IG.

25. Try something Soft and Buttery, Soft & Butter is an Indigenous skincare brand specialising in natural hand-harvested products from the Amazonian Rainforest. Their organic Gota Kula & Wild Geranium Scrub is rich in vitamin E. This face and body scrub aims to hydrate and leave skin feeling smooth. For more products shop softandbutter.com

26. Mantisfy's easy skincare routine set harnesses the power of Edelweiss and Salicornia. The high-quality formula and premium ingredients aim to help improve the appearance of fine lines and acne skin, keep your confidence within, and slay the night in any situation! Use GQ10 for 10% off (expires 23/8/22). Visit mantisfy.com and follow [@realmantisfy](https://www.instagram.com/realmantisfy) on IG for more skincare tips and tricks!

The Man Cave



1. Ride in style this Summer. Inspired by motorcycle design, **NewGen** have created a new generation of e-bikes. Built in the UK with the highest quality components, their flagship 345 has been designed with the rider in mind. With a leather seat, plush front suspension and effortless pedal assist you are in for a smooth ride. Whether you are a city commuter, countryside cruiser or sea loving surfer, nowhere is out of bounds on the 345! Visit newgenbikes.com and follow [@newgen_bikes](https://www.instagram.com/newgen_bikes) on IG.

2. Ride wide, ride cool. **Wideboy Scooters** are the biggest, fastest, and most powerful electric scooters, plus they are only electric scooter in the world created with curb appeal at heart. Available as Wideboy 500LR (£850) Wideboy 1000PRO (£1350) Cool, Stylish and Safe in Town. Big fun off-road too. Visit wideboyscooters.com

3. Connect with the presence and purity of HYTN in the comfort of your own home with the world's first wireless CBD Diffuser. Each of the signature home fragrances are infused with the rejuvenating and therapeutic benefits of their bespoke HYTN CBD oils to help you feel more balanced, both mentally and physically. Visit hytn.co and follow [@hytn.co](https://www.instagram.com/hytn.co) on IG.

4. Inspired by the new race to Space, Mercator London offers a range of unique pens and accessories, beautifully CNC-machined in 316L stainless steel and aircraft grade aluminium. 'Nominal', inspired by SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket, is made of 34 individual precision components. Nestled perfectly flush to the body, 4 retracted steel landing legs deploy when the cap is twisted. Use code GQ10 for 10% off (expires 31/08/22). Visit mercator.london and follow [@mercatorlondon](https://www.instagram.com/mercatorlondon) on IG.

5. The new Maeving RM1 electric motorcycle features removable batteries you can charge from any plug socket and has been designed and made in Coventry: the heart of UK motorcycle heritage. Available in single-battery (£4995) or dual-battery (£5990) configurations for 40 or 80 miles of range respectively, the 45mph-capable RM1 has been engineered to make urban travel a joy. Visit maeving.com to place your deposit for delivery from August. Follow on IG: [@maevingelectricmotorcycles](https://www.instagram.com/maevingelectricmotorcycles)

6. ELEU was founded on the premise that sustainable, fashionable, and functional should also be comfortable. Eleu do not mass produce anything, so their products are made with a bit more care and love which you can see in the finished product! View the full collection at eleu.fit and follow [@eleu.fit](https://www.instagram.com/eleu.fit) on IG.

GQ's Taproom

1. In 1846, in the foothills of the Italian Alps, Giuseppe Menabrea found the perfect location and natural resources to build his brewery. To this day you'll find his award winning **Menabrea** Bionda Birra being brewed at the same site in Biella, by the same family using the same ingredients, passion and care. Visit menabrea.co.uk

2. The Isle Of Arran. If you've always wanted to try a good quality Single Malt but not sure where to start, let us introduce you to the Arran Single Malts from this idyllic island off the west-coast of Scotland. The Barrel Reserve Arran Single Malt is perfect for Spring and Summer, amazing on its own with fresh citrus and coconut notes and so refreshing mixed with cloudy lemonade. The beautiful Isle of Arran is your next whisky destination with two stunning distilleries to visit – Lochranza in the north and Lagg in the south. Visit arranwhisky.com to read all about this forward thinking distiller and make a plan to visit them this summer. In the meantime, the full range of Arran Single Malt Whiskies are available from specialist whisky shops and from arranwhisky.com. Search Arran Single Malt online for your nearest online retailer and follow [@arranwhisky](https://www.instagram.com/arranwhisky) on IG.

3. Craigellachie 14 Year Old Single Cask £70. Every **Canmore** Single Cask Whisky combines the distillers' artistry with the individuality of the cask, creating something truly unique. This limited-edition bottling comes from the revered Craigellachie distillery at the heart of Speyside. Warming, with notes of autumnal fruit, fudge, freshly-cut grass and dark chocolate. Available at MasterOfMalt.com and charlesedgeshop.com

4. Douglas Laing's Timorous Beastie is a high strength, hearty marriage of Single Cask Single Malts from the Highland region of Scotland. Timorous in name, but not by nature, expect sweet vanilla, meringue, and citrus flavours just bursting to be unleashed.

Visit douglaslaing.com and follow [@timorousbeastiewhisky](https://www.instagram.com/timorousbeastiewhisky)

5. Drawing upon a rich heritage, with a recipe that dates back to 1842, the **Gunner Saint** is a grown up ready to drink non-alcoholic cocktail of Ginger, Natural Bitters and Lime that is proudly made in the UK. Want to know more? Visit gunnerscocktails.co.uk to order and follow [@gunnerscocktail](https://www.instagram.com/gunnerscocktail) on IG.

6. Introducing **Mahala Botanical**, an award winning alcohol-free spirit from South Africa. This premium craft spirit is free from alcohol, sugar, colourants and artificial flavours, perfect for those seeking a healthy alternative to alcohol without compromising on taste or quality! Designed to be mixed with a premium tonic, ginger ale or sparkling water with aromas of clove and cardamom and subtle floral and citrus notes. Visit mahalabotanical.com and follow [@mahalabotanical](https://www.instagram.com/mahalabotanical) on IG.

7. Ezra Olive Oil produces cold-pressed olive oil, which is obtained from the early harvest green fruit of the olive trees grown without pesticides and fertilizers in the district of Mut, Turkey. This area has a microclimate feature and a high altitude, enriched with bitter almond and grass aromas. Visit ezraoliveoil.com.tr and follow [@ezraoliveoil](https://www.instagram.com/ezraoliveoil) on IG.

8. Copper Spirit Distillery presents their Verity Rye Spirit. Uniquely made with 100% organic rye in very small batches. A crystal clear virgin unaged whisky. Crisp floral notes, hints of pear and subtle spice, with creamy grain aromas. An unexpected spirit, perfect for sipping or substitute aged spirits in your favourite cocktails. Visit copperspirit.ca and follow [@copperspirit](https://www.instagram.com/copperspirit) on IG.

9. The **Di Giovanna** organic vineyards and winery are nestled inside the beautiful nature reserve of Monte Genuardo, near the small village of Sambuca di Sicilia (Agrigento). Visit them, as they celebrate 25 years of organic vine growing, for a unique opportunity to enjoy the Sicilian countryside while tasting their organic wines. Guided tours and tastings are offered by appointment. Visit di-giovanna.com and follow [@DiGiovannaWine](https://www.instagram.com/DiGiovannaWine) on IG. Photographed by Anam Cara.

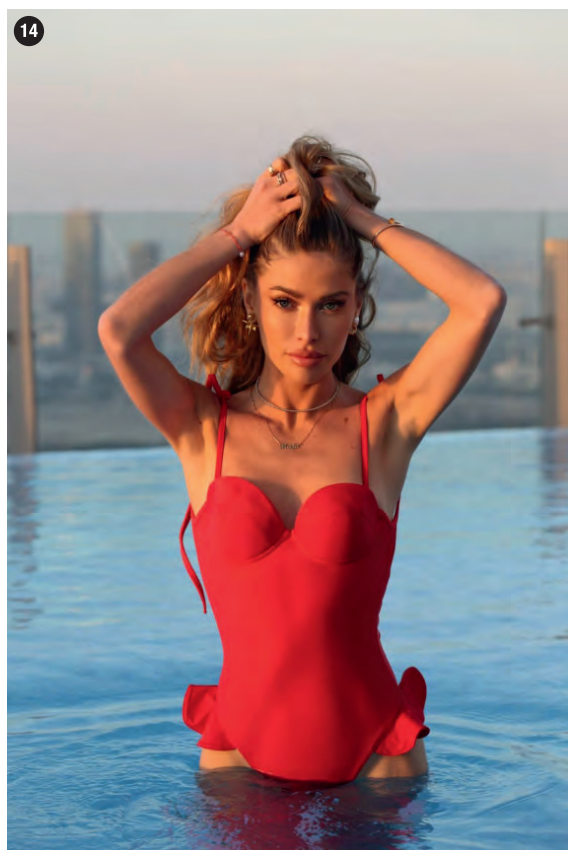
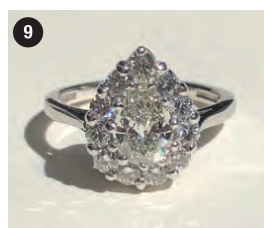
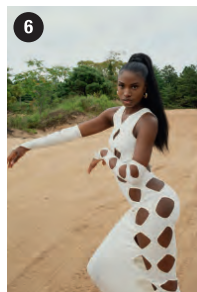
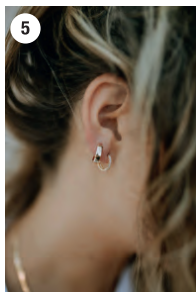
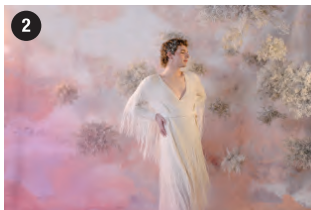
10. Le Tarot Spirits' reverse-labelled debut Soleil gin steps into medieval France and the ancient Tarot game. Infusing fragrances and flavours synonymous with the Occitanie region of France, this high-quality exclusive handcrafted gin is designed to bring the taste of French summer to your glass with bright citrus notes and stunningly fresh aroma. Photographed by Holly Burnston. Visit letarot-spirits.com and follow [@letarotspirits](https://www.instagram.com/letarotspirits) on IG.

11. Naturally Sugar Free soft drinks brand, **Nexba**, are makers of one of the UK's favourite kombucha including their Mixed Berry, Mango and other flavours. Nexba recently launched their Good Gut Feels Movement, which encourages people to look after their gut health. Download their free e-book from the Nexba website: nexba.co.uk and follow [@nexbauk](https://www.instagram.com/nexbauk) on IG.

12. Uhuru Spirits. Imagine this... heat, crashing waves, calypso beats, tropical fruits and buttery toffee flavours on your tongue. Uhuru's latest release, XO Caribbean Golden Rum, can get you close. Those Caribbean flavours, with oaky notes and a warm lingering finish all in one sip. 10% of all net sales are donated to leading conservation charity Tusk. Visit uhuruspirits.co.uk and follow [@uhuruspirits](https://www.instagram.com/uhuruspirits) on IG.



Hottest Hits



1. Amare Vita Skincare's The One is a multi-tasking, protective, and nourishing day cream. Formulated to combat environmental stressors, deeply moisturise and enrich the skin, it acts as a serum, moisturiser, primer, and SPF all in one, designed to protect, nourish with moisture and improve the skin's appearance. Visit amarevitas skincare.com and follow on IG: [@amarevitas skincare](https://www.instagram.com/amarevitas skincare)

2. Camelia Bridal is a New York-based online and pop-up boutique specialising in fashion-forward and one-of-a-kind women's jewellery, accessories, formal wear, and bridal attire. They carry designs from independent American, Canadian, and British designers, as well as pre-owned luxury items and their own unique original designs. Their brand focuses on eco-friendliness, inclusivity, and mixing old traditions with new ideas and aesthetics. Visit cameliabridal.com and IG: [@cameliabridal](https://www.instagram.com/cameliabridal)

3. Latham & Neve – known for their stunning contemporary hand-made British jewellery since 1997. Featured is the unique Ripple Bangle in beaten silver and 18ct gold. Ballroom bangles, awesome earrings, ravishing rings and much much more. To buy online and for details on stockists and brochures visit lathamandneve.co.uk or call **01580 753399**.

4. Designed for women who feel trapped by trauma, reminding them that there is light at the end of the tunnel. **Lolli A London** is a stylish and elegant jewellery brand, handmade in South East London. Their objective is to make every woman that wears their brand feel confident and special. Photographed by Tallulah Ballard. Visit lollialondon.com and follow [@lollialondon](https://www.instagram.com/lollialondon) on IG.

5. Raquel Rosalie Jewellery is a high quality hand curated jewellery brand. Each piece is handmade and carefully thought out and designed by Raquel herself. Made of only 14 carat gold filled or higher, the pieces are durable, waterproof, and at an affordable price. Visit them at raquelrosalie.com or on IG [@raquelrosalie](https://www.instagram.com/raquelrosalie)

6. Founded by Ashlee Maynard, **Maison Ashforde** provides a wardrobe for the intrepid woman. Their collections are built to define fearlessness and inclusivity, to help you express your inner beauty and style whilst stepping out of your comfort zone for you – not for anyone else. Maison Ashforde encourages women to own their femininity, feeling powerful simultaneously while wearing the garments. Visit ashforde.us and IG [@maisonashforde](https://www.instagram.com/maisonashforde)

7. Reyah Lewis is a designer brand based in London. The RL Cuban necklace is designed with longevity and sustainability in mind, as well as being sold at an affordable price. Tenisha Lewis, founder and CEO, aims to take the brand to another level by introducing ready to wear items in late 2022. Stay updated with them by signing up to their monthly newsletter. Visit reyahlewis.com and follow [@reyahlewis](https://www.instagram.com/reyahlewis) on IG for 10% off your first order. Use code Welcome10 (ends: 23/08/22).

8. Mika Nicole New York was founded/designed by Shemika Ridley and ethically made in NYC. Mika Nicole is a contemporary womenswear brand, that focuses on the embodiment of a modern women's femininity. The essence of their brand derives from a woman who embraces being a girly girl at heart. Visit mikanicoleny.com and follow [@mikanicoleny](https://www.instagram.com/mikanicoleny) on IG.

9. Auréa Fine Jewellery is a vintage fine jewellery brand offering beautiful vintage, antique, and preloved modern jewellery. Their carefully curated collections include jewellery for everyday, engagement rings, and cocktail pieces. With each sale they donate 5% to Tommy's charity. Find Auréa at aureiafinejewellery.com and [@aureiafinejewellery](https://www.instagram.com/aureiafinejewellery) on IG.

10. Simon Wright offers a complete bespoke service, making your jewellery in platinum and gold using the finest diamonds and gemstones. An appointment involves viewing stones, a short tour of the workshop, and a sit down design session all in his Clerkenwell studio workshop. By appointment only. Visit sw-jewellery.com or follow on IG [@sw_jewellery](https://www.instagram.com/sw_jewellery)

11. CHIC by DMO is an all natural, organic, cruelty free brand celebrating 4 years this year. Their body care range has been very successful amongst customers prioritising healthy wellbeing. Their CHIC organic Aloe Vera Shampoo and Masque are available at the salon and online at chicbydmo.com To book an appointment call **020 7221 4004**.

12. NÜR San Francisco is an Afghan female owned brand offering a modern take on jewellery, inspired by the brightness of cultural traditions. All pieces are durably gold plated as NÜR aims to provide accessible, high quality jewellery that can be passed from one generation to the next. Visit nursanfrancisco.com IG: [@shopxnur](https://www.instagram.com/shopxnur)

13. CHIEIRA is a Portuguese fashion brand that combines sustainability, quality, and timelessness. With elegant lines connected to an ethical sense of fashion and to the capacity of being different. CHIEIRA shows the evolution, revolution, power, strength, sensuality and freedom of a modern and independent woman. Visit chieira.com and follow [@chieira_official](https://www.instagram.com/chieira_official) on IG.

14. Botanical Beach Babes Presents the Crown Collection featuring Maja Malnar. Join them this Summer at The SLS Dubai Privilege Club and The SLS South Beach for 2022 Miami Swim Week. Visit botanicalbeachbabes.com and follow [@botanicalbeachbabes](https://www.instagram.com/botanicalbeachbabes) on IG.

15. Founded in 2020, **Ciriaco** is about bringing fun and ease back into your wardrobe, with just the silhouette of a bag adding an abstract element to any outfit. Their Structured Buffed Asymmetrical Shoulder Baguette features beautifully embossed viper snakeskin made of PU leather in green and black and their signature silver metal logo. Visit madebyciriaco.us and IG [@madebyciriaco](https://www.instagram.com/madebyciriaco)

16 Viki Swim is made for women who aren't afraid to show some skin. Founder, Victoria Marie, has focused on minimal figure flattering silhouettes and high-quality shimmer fabrics. All swimwear is designed in London and handmade ethically in Bali. Shop now at vikiswim.com and follow [@vikiswimwear](https://www.instagram.com/vikiswimwear) on IG.

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BEACHSIDE BEAUTIES

Be the host with the most with a home by the coast – the most popular holiday houses come with a spectacular sea view



CLIFTON COTTAGE, DEVON

Commanding a remarkable clifftop position, this Grade II-listed house offers a panoramic vista of the Jurassic coast and the English Channel. There's a west-facing garden and a large terrace that overlooks the beach. £2.95 million.

Knight Frank: 01392 848839

As summer gets underway and temperatures rise, a coastal retreat is at the top of everyone's wish-list. 'The last two years have seen a frenetic resurgence in the UK seaside market,' says Jonathan Cunliffe, who runs a leading estate agency based in Cornwall. 'Prime coastal property continues to attract buyers seeking a

different pace of life, whether it's a holiday cottage or a family home.'

Currently on his books is Comprigney, a Grade II-listed manor in Truro, which is surrounded by mature gardens and looks out towards the cathedral. Up for sale for the first time since 1980, this historic property includes parts dating back to the 16th century, although it has a very Georgian feel with its tall sash windows and high ceilings. Its generously proportioned rooms and central location

make for a fantastically comfortable home that's well placed for everything that Cornwall has to offer.

In Sidmouth, Devon, Knight Frank is selling Clifton Cottage, which occupies a remarkable clifftop spot overlooking the beach and has incredible views across the English Channel. Its name is somewhat deceptive – although it's called a cottage, it spans almost 5,000 square feet, with five large bedrooms and several reception rooms. The property is brimming with

MOUSEHOLE, CORNWALL

This seaside cottage is set in one of Cornwall's prettiest fishing villages – perched on the harbour's edge, with views towards St Michael's Mount. Inside, there are three double bedrooms, all en suite, and an open-plan kitchen and dining area. £1.1 million.
Savills: 01872 243200



HIGH VIEW HOUSE, HAMPSHIRE

Located in the port town of Lymington, this Grade II-listed house is set over four floors and has a wealth of character. In addition to the five bedrooms, there's a self-contained flat on the lower ground floor. Outside there's a walled garden and a home office, along with various outbuildings and an octagonal summerhouse. £2.5 million.
John D Wood & Co: 01590 540139



CREEKSIDE, CORNWALL

Located on Pill Creek, with easy access to the popular sailing waters of the Carrick Roads, this modern riverside home is perfect for water-sports enthusiasts. Downstairs, there's a vast open-plan space that encompasses the kitchen and sitting area, while upstairs there are four bedrooms. £2 million.
Nest Seekers: 01872 492026

THE GUNNERY, KENT

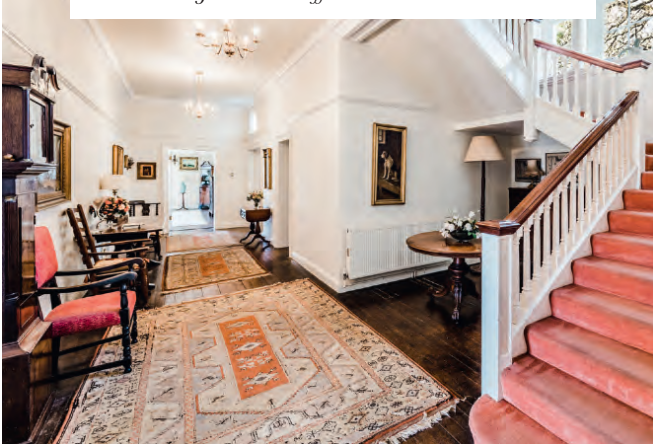
Built from a former Second World War gun emplacement, this unique property has exceptional views of the Channel, from the white cliffs of Dover to France. It's worthy of a James Bond film – access to the house from the garage is via a glass lift that runs through the cliff. £3.25 million.
Strutt & Parker: 020 7591 2213



COMPRIGNEY, CORNWALL

This elegant manor house is one of the finest properties in Truro, set in an elevated position with large private gardens. As well as all the amenities of the city being close at hand, there are plenty of countryside walks on the doorstep. £2 million.

Jonathan Cunliffe: 01326 617447



SEAWOOD HOUSE, DEVON

This Regency villa is perched next to the historic cliffside railway in the charming town of Lynton on the Exmoor coast. Currently set up as a boutique hotel, it has eight bedroom suites and a self-contained, three-bedroom flat. £1.5 million.

Knight Frank: 01392 423111

character, from its thatched roof to the stained-glass panels that decorate the front door. To the rear of the house is a paved terrace which gives a bird's-eye view of the Jurassic coast.

Up in North Norfolk lies Bliss Blakeney,

a striking contemporary property that's located in the heart of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a couple of miles from the picturesque market town of Holt. Built five years ago, it's within a short stroll of Blakeney's salt marshes and

harbour, and is surrounded by balconies and terraces to make the most of the setting. There's even a 'sea room', set between the ground and first floors with an uninterrupted vista out to the North Sea – a room with a view, indeed.

BLISS BLAKENEY, NORFOLK

Embrace modern living with this bold newbuild in the popular village of Blakeney. This nine-bedroom house has plenty to recommend it, including a cinema room, a large master suite with two dressing rooms, and a wellbeing room with steam room, treatment area and gym.

£6 million. *Savills: 01603 229229*



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HAREFIELD PLACE

Harefield Place is an exclusive collection of 25 luxury two and three bedroom apartments nestled in 8.5 acres of greenbelt countryside.

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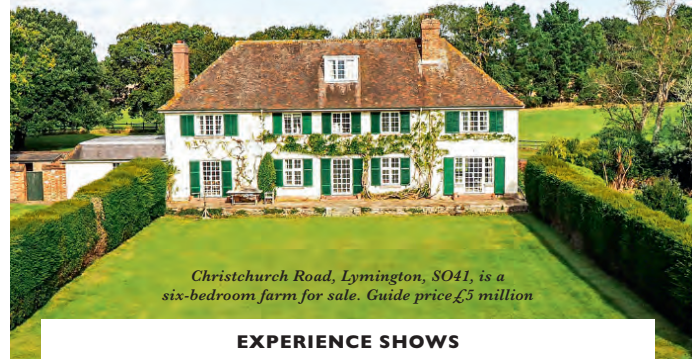
A round-up of the latest property news,
from inspiring events to expert advice



HEART OF THE ACTION

Pavilion Road off Sloane Square, created and managed by the Cadogan Estate, has become one of London's most popular mews streets. With its collection of artisan food shops, cafes and restaurants that attract local residents and visitors alike, there's always plenty going on, no matter what the season. Looking forwards, this autumn will see an 'Edible Trail', where visitors can unearth the secrets behind the street's fantastic array of planting and get inspired about sustainable produce.

For more information, visit cadogan.co.uk



Christchurch Road, Lymington, SO41, is a six-bedroom farm for sale. Guide price £5 million

EXPERIENCE SHOWS

This year, the leading estate agency John D. Wood & Co celebrates its 150th anniversary. It's marking the occasion by introducing a new commemorative logo that features the handwriting of its founder John Daniel Wood, who opened the first office at 6 Mount Street, Mayfair, in 1872. With 28 sales and lettings offices across London and the UK, as well as 3,000 affiliated partners worldwide, it's well placed to offer local expertise and a bespoke service – an approach that's been trusted for generations.

For more information, visit johndwood.co.uk

GLORIOUS GREENERY

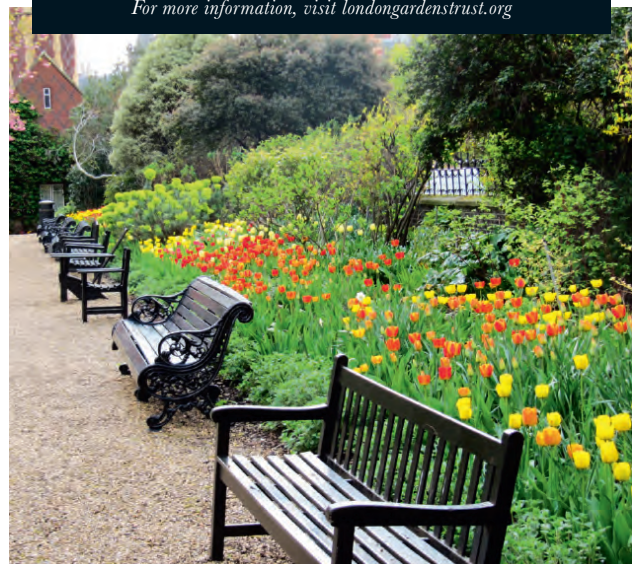
Explore the capital's hidden green spaces at London Square Open Gardens Weekend, which runs on 11 and 12 June. Sponsored by the award-winning property developer London Square and organised by the London Gardens Trust, it will see over 100 different locations open their gates to the public, from formal garden squares to rooftop terraces. Take a turn around Ladbroke Square in Notting Hill, explore the historic Lincoln's Inn grounds in Holborn, and discover the Alara Permaculture Garden, an oasis of calm tucked away behind King's Cross.

For more information, visit londongardenstrust.org

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

With 35 years' experience in the Surrey, Sussex and South West London property market, Richard Winter has built up an independent residential advisory company that focuses solely on helping private clients secure their dream home. 'Buying a home is an emotional journey,' says Winter. 'Our clients find it invaluable to have someone they know and trust on their side.' The team's extensive contacts and forensic knowledge enable buyers to get to properties first – more than 80 per cent of the homes they have helped purchase were off-market.

For more information, visit richard-winter.com



WEDDERBURN COTTAGE HAMPSTEAD NW3

A BEAUTIFUL, RARELY AVAILABLE GRADE II LISTED HOUSE BUILT CIRCA 1886 BY THE CELEBRATED VICTORIAN ARCHITECT HORACE FIELD FOR HIS OWN OCCUPATION AND THAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF HIS FINEST WORKS.



The house which is over 3 floors (predominantly over 2), features a unique mix of original features and stonework alongside modern architectural influences including a stunning kitchen extension, which was shortlisted for the RIBA award in 2017.

Set well back from the road via a gated carriage driveway the property is conveniently situated on possibly the most coveted tree-lined roads lying South of the Village being as it is within easy reach of both Hampstead High Street and Belsize Village with numerous schools, excellent transport amenities and a wide range of cafes, boutiques and numerous local restaurants all easily accessible.

ACCOMMODATION & AMENITIES

Reception hall | Drawing room | Reception room | Dining room
Exceptional extended kitchen/breakfast room | Guest cloakroom
Master bedroom with large dressing room/bathroom (previously bedroom 2) and shower room | 5 further bedrooms | Shower room
| Ample storage | Gym, (previously a garage) | Separate garage
Sweeping carriage driveway | 65' south facing garden.



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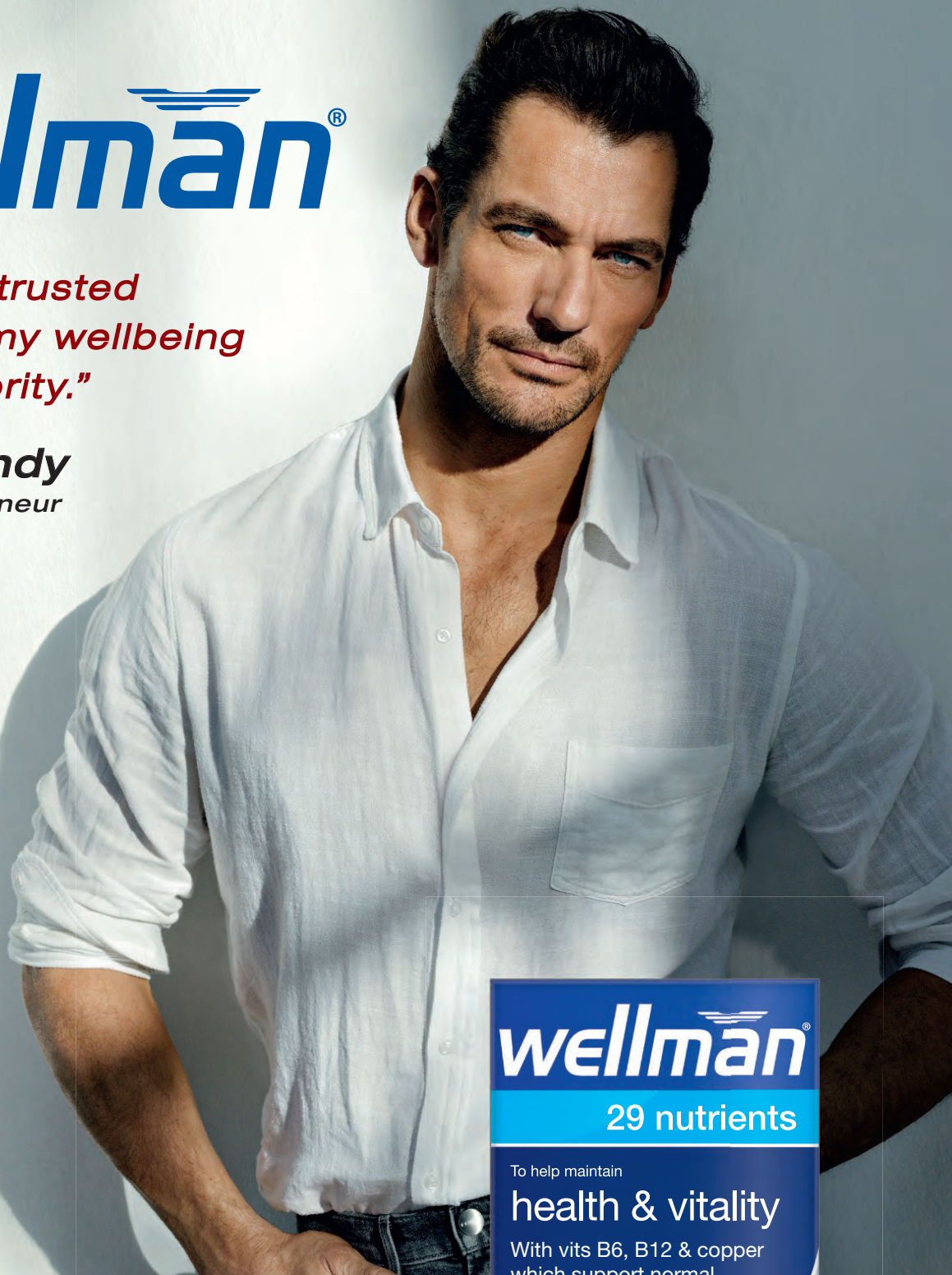
Designer Tremaine Emory reigns Supreme as the streetwear titan's newly crowned creative director. Read his interview in this issue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEREMY LIEBMAN

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